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No.273/February 2011

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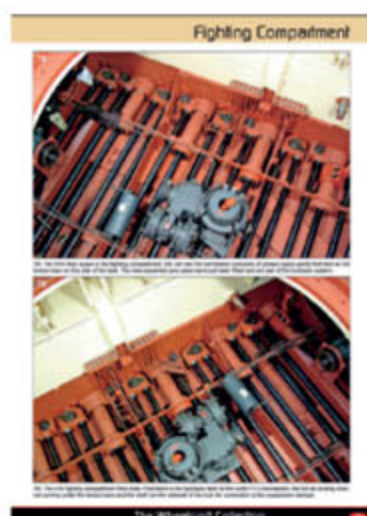
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# Readers' Letters

MI readers are invited to write to the Editor. Letters should be addressed to: Tim Newark, Military Illustrated, 3 Barton Buildings, off Queen Square, Bath BA1 2JR. E-mail: [timn@fsmail.net](mailto:timn@fsmail.net)

## Ten Years in Afghanistan

A call for poetry linked to the military operations in Afghanistan has come from Ryan Gearing, boss of military bookseller and publisher Tommies Guides. Explains Ryan: 'In November 2011, it will be ten years since British troops entered Afghanistan following the terror attacks in New York. I want to produce an anthology of the poetry written by men and women of all three services, involved in securing freedom for the people of Afghanistan, or poetry that has inspired them and their families as they carry out their dangerous duties.' Tommies Guides intends to publish the anthology to commemorate the anniversary and give it the title, Enduring Freedom, the original military name for operations in Afghanistan. For each book sold, there will be a donation to the charity Combat Stress, whose workload is much greater as a result of

the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Wing Commander David Hill, Chief Executive of Combat Stress, welcomes the plan, commenting: 'For 90 years Combat Stress has led the way in providing vital support to veterans suffering from mental ill health. With the Armed Forces constantly in action, we are being approached by more and more veterans who are seeking our unique help. Since 2005, we have seen a 72 per cent increase in new referrals. That's why we are delighted to back this unusual initiative from Tommies Guides.'

Suggestions for poems to be included in the anthology should be sent to:

Ryan Gearing, Tommies Guides, Menin House, 13 Hunloke Avenue, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN22 8UL; or email: [sales@tommiesguides.co.uk](mailto:sales@tommiesguides.co.uk)

## Project Hougoumont

My own visits to Hougoumont—the farmhouse that played such an important part in the battle of Waterloo—have left me increasingly worried about its condition, and a number of other visitors – from professional battlefield guides to enthusiastic amateurs – wrote, telephoned or e-mailed to suggest that something should be done as a matter of urgency. A small group of us met (fittingly enough in a Berkshire pub), and Project Hougoumont was formally launched in June 2008: in October that year we became an affiliate of Waterloo 200, the official organisation entrusted with overseeing the commemoration of the 200th anniversary Waterloo in 2015. We were unable to begin serious fundraising until we were registered with the Charity Commission, a process which itself depended on a series of necessarily complex discussions with the Belgian local authority, which now owns the site and has extensive plans for the sympathetic redevelopment of the central part of the battlefield.

However, in May 2010 we were at last registered with the commission, and are able devote ourselves to the task of raising money. We will work in collaboration with other interested parties, most notably the local authority, and the Belgian government itself will meet part of the restoration cost. It is our hope to have the majority of the work completed in time for the 200th anniversary of the battle. You will not need me to tell you that today's financial climate is scarcely benign, and some potential corporate donors are no longer able to offer the sort of support that might have been forthcoming just a few years ago. Lottery funding, which might have been available for a project within the United Kingdom, cannot be used for schemes abroad. But it was always our expectation that the project would attract the interest of a wide variety of people, and our Chosen Men scheme encourages individual donations. Please visit [www.projecthougoumont.com](http://www.projecthougoumont.com)

*Richard Holmes*

[www.TimNewark.com](http://www.TimNewark.com)



**Cover: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, portrayed as legendary German battlefield commander.**

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Rommel was at odds with Hitler and Field Marshal von Rundstedt over how to best deploy the panzers to repel an Allied invasion of France.

# ROMMEL Versus HITLER

His panzers were poised to repel D-Day, but as ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES reveals, celebrated German commander Rommel was wasting time in a head to head with Nazi leader Hitler and his other generals over how best to smash the invaders.



**A**t 0020 hours on D-Day 6 June 1944, the quietness of the night was shattered as British gliders of the 6th Airborne Division touched down by the Caen canal bridge at Bénouville and the Orne River bridge near Ranville. The paras leapt from their aircraft and after a short sharp exchange with the startled German guards successfully secured both bridges.

Nineteen-year-old Lance Corporal Werner Kortenhaus and his comrades from 21st Panzer Division were baffled that after all their anti-invasion training they just sat there kicking their heels: 'I would say that we were ready to march at 2.00am at the latest. As well as the earlier alarm, news of an airborne landing at Caen had come through on the telephone, and we were ready to go. The engines of the tanks were running, but we didn't receive any marching orders. We thought "If we have to march, let's do it now while it's dark and the enemy planes can't see us." We waited for orders—and waited. Just stood there, inactive by our tanks. We couldn't understand why we weren't getting any orders at all.'

Major General Edgar Feuchtinger, commander of 21st Panzer was in Paris and hastening back to his command. 'I waited impatiently all night for some instructions,' he recalled. 'But not a single order from a higher formation was received by me. Realizing that my armoured division was closet to the scene of operations, I finally decided at 6.30am that I had to take some action. I ordered my tanks to attack 6th Airborne Division which had entrenched itself in a bridgehead over the Orne. To me this constituted the most immediate threat to the German position. Finally, at 10.00am, I was given my first operational instructions. I was ordered to stop the move of my tanks against the Allied airborne troops, and to turn west and aid forces protecting Caen.'

This indecision and confusion cost Hitler and his generals precious time.

'In our briefing,' remembered Glider Pilot Alexander Morrison, 6th Airborne, who landed east of the Orne in the Ranville area, 'we had been told that the German 21st Panzer Division was located further east of our position and that the anticipated armour counter-attack would first come from them. Accordingly when at 4.00am we could distinctly hear the sound of tracked vehicles, we realised that we were now "for it" because a 45-ton Tiger tank presents a formidable proposition! But miracles happened and

this time we were saved by the Navy.

'It was a fantastic experience to witness the terrible firepower of this battleship and to hear the huge shells roaring overhead like express trains to land with devastating effect right on the German assembly. The carnage must have been appalling and the severely damaged tanks shortly abandoned their attack and retired on Caen.'

The upshot was that 6th Airborne was spared a nasty mauling and the vital bridges remained in Allied hands. In the meantime, Feuchtinger's men miraculously were not strafed or bombed as they trundled toward Caen. The city

### Unfortunate chain of command

Just two days before D-Day, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, reassured that the tides would not be suitable for an invasion, departed his Army Group B HQ at Chateau Roche Guyon outside Paris and headed for his home near Ulm on the Danube. Sometime after 0100 on 6 June, a bleary eyed Admiral Hoffman was roused from his bed at the HQ of Chief of Operations Naval Group West in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. He found himself leafing through a series of reports from the remaining naval radar stations. Despite the Allies best efforts, there could be



The first Rommel's panzers knew of the Allied invasion of Normandy was the arrival of British and American airborne troops. Fortunately for the Paras, 21st Panzer's response was confused and half-hearted.

itself was not so lucky. As Kortenhaus related they were on borrowed time: 'The long road from Falaise to Caen rises to a hill where one can suddenly get a view over Caen, and as we drove over this hill we got a shock because the city of Caen was burning. I had never seen the city before, never been there at all, and all I could see was a huge black cloud over Caen as though oil had been burnt. At that point, I realized for the first time that I was at war. As we got closer to Caen our tanks had difficulty getting through the city because the streets were covered with rubble. So we lost a lot of time while some tanks went west around the city and others went east.'

no hiding the vast armada approaching the Normandy coast and Hoffman turned to his men, exclaiming 'this can only be the invasion fleet. Signal to the Fuhrer's headquarters the invasion is on.'

On hearing the news, Rommel dutifully sped back, but did not arrive until the afternoon of D-Day and was unable to exert any influence on the swift commitment of the panzers. It was not until after the landings had taken place that Rommel finally began to move his panzer reserves toward the Allies bridgehead. The 2nd Panzer Division moved west from Amiens, while the 9th SS and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, part of



the powerful 2nd SS Panzer Corps, were summoned from the Eastern Front five days later.

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, German Commander-in-Chief West, later noted with regret: 'I have been criticized because it was said that I delayed too long in committing my Panzer Divisions against the bridgehead. This meant that a counter-attack could not be organised until the morning of 7 June. By then the bridgehead was over 30 hours old and it was too late.'

Bitterly commenting on this inertia after the war, Rundstedt, perhaps trying to salvage his own reputation, observed: 'I was not allowed to use them without getting permission from the Führer in his headquarters on the Eastern Front. What did he know of the battle in Normandy? We rang up every few hours, but he refused until it was too late, until, in fact, you had your anti-tank guns and many tanks ashore. I practically had to ask him whether I was to put a sentry at the front or back of my headquarters.'

At 1400 on the 6th, Hitler released the 12th SS (allowed to move to Lisieux but not committed to the fighting) and Panzer Lehr to von Rundstedt. General Friedrich Dollmann, commander of the German 7th Army, like Rundstedt, did not hear of this decision until 1600. It mattered

little, as neither division would be able to intervene on D-Day.

In the event of invasion, Panzergruppe West was directed to become a combat command, but not under Rommel's direct authority. When General Geyr von Schweppenburg finally got the order he claimed he was dismayed at the muddled arrangements: 'The chain of command from Panzergruppe West up was most unfortunate. Panzergruppe West was still under 7th Army. The decision to interpose another staff between Rommel and von Geyr may have been made by OB West because it was aware of the friendly relation between Panzergruppe West and the staff of 7th Army – the latter acting as a "buffer state." At a moment when everything depended on rapid action, orders were issued to just two and three-quarters Panzer Divisions by the following headquarters: 1st SS Panzer Corps, Panzergruppe West, 7th Army at Le Mans, Army Group B, OB West, and OKW.'

Clearly, the situation was a complete mess and the Germans were to tie themselves in dreadful knots. Rundstedt reasoned the Allies would attack the Pas de Calais as this was the shortest crossing point and just four days march from the vital German industrial region of the Ruhr. The massing of the American 3rd Army and the Canadian 1st Army opposite the Pas de Calais convinced von Rundstedt, as well as Rommel (who had taken command of Army Group B stretching from the Dutch border to the

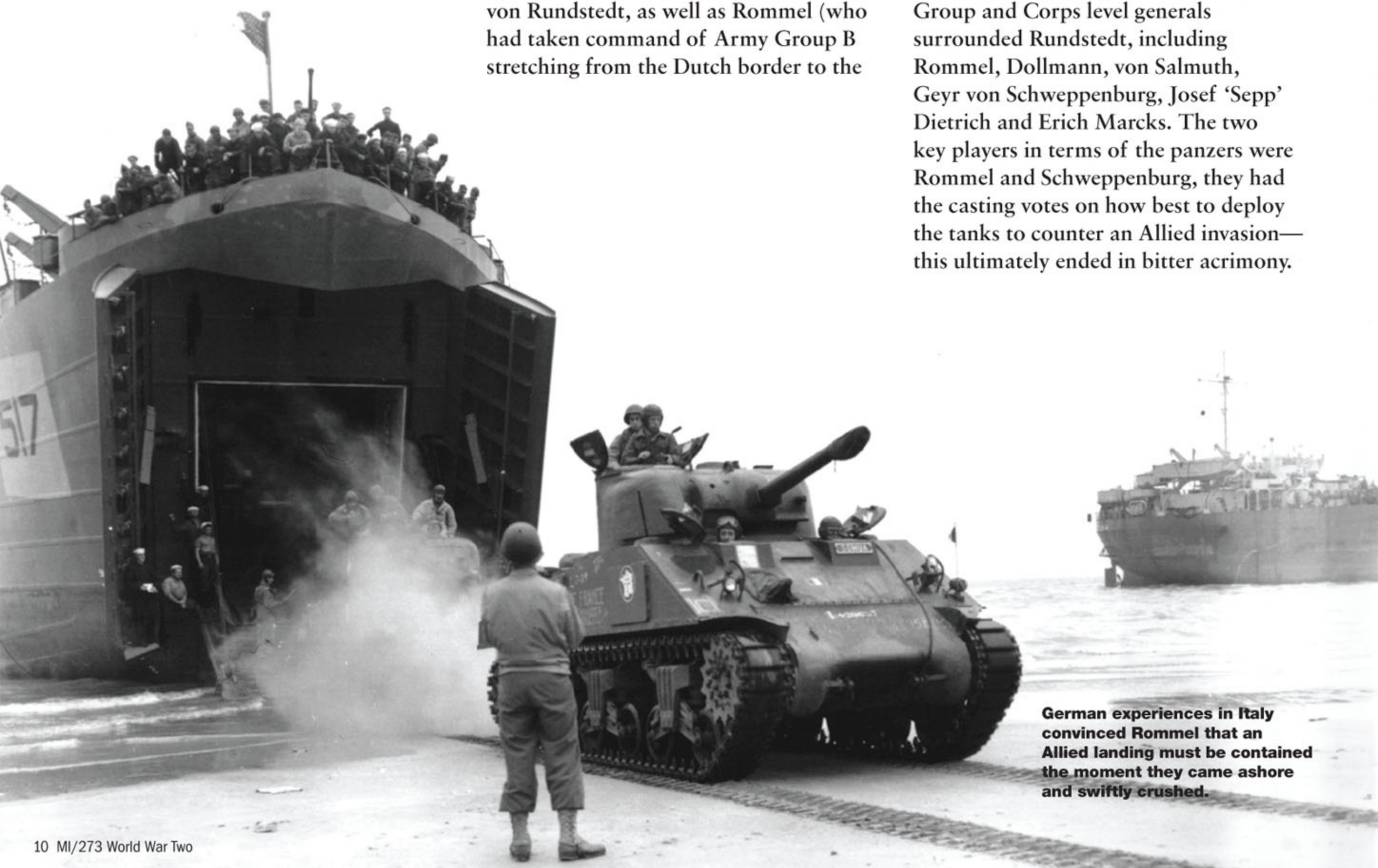
Loire in February 1944) and Hitler.

The Allies deliberately blinded Rommel's forces along the Channel by knocking out his radars, though this had to be done in such a selective manner as not to alert him or his boss as to the true location of the amphibious assault. RAF Typhoon fighter-bombers played a key role in this, striking sites from Ostende to Cherbourg and the Channel islands. To help foster the illusion that the Pas de Calais was the most likely crossing point, some radars in this area were left alone. Along the coast, out of 92 radar sites, only 18 were operational by the time of the invasion and they were to be further misled by dummy invasion fleets.

The net result was that Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW – the Armed Forces High Command) gave priority to General Hans von Salmuth's 15th Army north of the Seine. This meant Rundstedt's better forces remained in the Pas de Calais area due to the Allies successful deception efforts, which had a negative affect on General Friedrich Dollmann's 7th Army covering Normandy and Brittany. A phantom Allied 4th Army in Scotland also convinced Hitler of a threat to Norway, pinning down even more troops in Scandinavia.

### **Panzer counter-attack**

A team of highly experienced Army Group and Corps level generals surrounded Rundstedt, including Rommel, Dollmann, von Salmuth, Geyr von Schweppenburg, Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich and Erich Marcks. The two key players in terms of the panzers were Rommel and Schweppenburg, they had the casting votes on how best to deploy the tanks to counter an Allied invasion—this ultimately ended in bitter acrimony.



**German experiences in Italy convinced Rommel that an Allied landing must be contained the moment they came ashore and swiftly crushed.**





**Field Marshal von Rundstedt favoured a 'crust-cushion-hammer' strategy, with sea defences acting as the 'crust', infantry reserves the 'cushion' and panzers the 'hammer'.**

While Hitler accepted Rundstedt's view, Rommel suspected an attack would take place between Caen and Cherbourg, with a possible second invasion astride the Somme directed toward the port of Le Havre. Hitler did take on Rommel's concerns for Normandy and on 6 May 1944 signalled Rundstedt that he attached great importance to Cherbourg and the Normandy coast. In response, the 91st Airlanding Division was sent to the Cotentin peninsula, 21st Panzer was relocated from Brittany south of Caen and Panzer Lehr was summoned from Hungary to be positioned south of Chartres. This was bad news for the Allies having selected Normandy for D-Day and Operation Overlord.

To defeat an Allied invasion, von Rundstedt favoured a 'crust-cushion-hammer' concept: the crust being formed by the static sea defences, the cushion by infantry reserves and the hammer by the armoured divisions held further back. Schweppenburg, commander of Panzergruppe West, agreed with Rundstedt, believing the panzer divisions should be kept inland ready to encircle the Allies as they tried to advance on

Paris. His command had been set up with responsibility for training the Panzer Divisions, but it was also conceived as a headquarters, subordinated to the German 7th Army, to coordinate a massed panzer counter-attack in the event of an invasion in Normandy.

In contrast, Rommel wanted the panzers well forward to deal with the Allies as soon as they waded ashore. He felt any airborne landings in the rear could be easily dealt with by those troops to hand. Rommel had made his name as a panzer leader in France and North Africa and had also orchestrated the successful seizure of northern Italy. He knew only too well how potent Allied air power could be, which is partly why he advocated keeping the panzers near the coast. He did not reckon with the power of Allied naval gunfire, which would greatly hamper the panzers even when they did get near the beachhead.

Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery was well aware of these tensions. In April 1944, he had briefed his commanders, commenting: 'Some of us here know Rommel well. He is a determined commander and likes

to hurl his armour into battle. But according to what we know of the chain of command, the armoured divisions are being kept directly under Rundstedt and delay may be caused before they are released to Rommel. This fact may help us, and quarrels may arise between the two of them.'

This argument, between von Rundstedt and Schweppenburg on the one hand, and Rommel on the other, resulted in an unwieldy compromise, with Rommel retaining command of 2nd (beyond the Somme), 21st and 116th Panzer Divisions (beyond the Seine), with the 1st SS and 12th SS Panzer Divisions and Panzer Lehr remaining under von Rundstedt's authority. The reserves constituted part of Panzergruppe West. The latter attempted to avoid frittering away its panzers by getting von Rundstedt to issue an order forbidding the piecemeal diversion of elements of the panzer divisions. Once the reality of the invasion set in, this order was soon abandoned.

### **Rommel's asparagus**

While Hitler was understandably impressed by Rommel's proposals, it





**Rommel was reliant on a quick reaction by the resurrected 21st Panzer Division, which was equipped with an unwieldy mix of German and French armour.**



**As 21st Panzer struggled toward the city of Caen, an enormous cloud of black smoke greeted it, courtesy of Allied bombers.**

was Schweppenburg who swayed the day by personally visiting him to argue that the panzers should be held under a centralised command in the forests astride the Seine. Schweppenburg felt the greatest threat would be from an airborne landing. He was also of the view that the Allies should be allowed to penetrate inland before being counter-attacked. Hitler backed von Rundstedt and Schweppenburg, refusing Rommel's request to deploy the 12th SS at the base of the Cotentin peninsula and for Panzer Lehr to deploy to Avranches.

This conflict reached such a tempo that Rommel and Schweppenburg fell out. 'I am an experienced tank commander,' Rommel told Schweppenburg in no uncertain terms, 'you and I do not see eye to eye on anything. I refuse to work with you any more.' Monty was proved right.

On a personal level, Rommel can only have felt slighted after a subordinate commander whose responsibility was ostensibly to oversee panzer training had undermined his authority. It must have further irked him that even if Panzergruppe West did become an operational command, he expected it to come directly under Army Group B's control. In the event this was not to happen.

The reserves though could not be deployed without the approval of OKW. Hitler as C-in-C exercised command through his chief of Staff, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel and Chief of Operations Staff General Alfred Jodl. This meant that the release of C-in-C West's reserve panzer force, as we have seen, was unlikely to happen in a hurry.

Even the forward deployment of a

single panzer division caused much debate. General Günther Blumentritt, von Rundstedt's Chief of Staff noted, 'There were prolonged arguments as to where the 21st Panzer Division should be placed. Field Marshal von Rundstedt would have preferred it to the south of St Lô, behind the Cherbourg [Cotentin] Peninsula. But Rommel chose to put it nearer the coast and on the other flank, close to Caen. This meant that it was too near the coast to be really available as a reserve for the sector as a whole.'

Rommel's intuition proved correct, although the ultimate issue of where the rest of the panzers should be best placed was never really resolved, nor in reality could it be. It is strange, given the lessons the Germans had provided Europe about the power of massed armour, that their panzer divisions should be scattered from Bordeaux to Belgium.

In the run up to D-Day, 21st Panzer was far from idle, with its limited and in some case antiquated resources it made every preparation it could for the anticipated Allied attack. 'In April 1944, we were still stationed in Brittany,' recalled Lance Corporal Kortenhaus, 'but were then moved to the area of Caen at the end of the month. I believe that this was at the order of Rommel himself. In the weeks that followed, we actually occupied ourselves less with military training, but more with manual work because we had to dig holes in which to bury our tanks, so that only the gun barrel was above the earth. It was very strenuous physical work for young people, and when we had finished that, there were still the lorries and munition stores to dig in. And added to all this was also the fact that the large

flat plain where we were was expected to be a site for enemy air landings, so we stuck lots of trees – chopped down trees – vertically into the earth. We called these "Rommel's asparagus", because it was Rommel who had ordered them.'

The 21st Panzer's organisation was largely unique in Normandy. Unlike the other panzer divisions (with the exception of 10th SS), it had no Panther tank battalion. Instead, it had an assault gun battalion and an anti-tank battalion with towed 88mm guns. In addition each of its infantry regiments had one battalion equipped with armoured half-track personnel carriers. At the beginning of June 1944, the division had a total of 104 Panzer IVs and was almost full strength with some 17,000 men.

Petrol and ammunition shortages greatly hampered training. While each panzer had its full complement of 100 shells, for live firing the crews were only allowed to expend one or two rounds. Like all soldiers, food became a preoccupation with the men constantly grumbling about the lack of rations and their poor quality. Understandably, the local French farmers did not go out their way to supply the division and in the name of good discipline Feuchtinger's officers did all they good to prevent theft and looting. It was made clear any one caught stealing would be imprisoned.

Despite all the hard work and lack of supplies, 21st Panzer's morale remained high. In the back of the panzertruppen's minds, they knew strategically, following Stalingrad and El Alamein, events were not going well, but the task in front of them was another matter and they were confident about that.





While Rommel was largely thwarted in placing his panzers near the French coast, he also greatly underestimated the power of naval gunfire that was soon engaging his massed armour.

### **Typhoon fighter-bombers**

Following the chaos of D-Day, the British remained vulnerable as Feuchtinger manoeuvred into position to counter-attack. Between the British beach codenamed Sword and the Canadians' Juno beachhead to the west, the Germans held a four-mile (6km) wide strip that ran all the way to the coast. British Royal Marine Commandos had been unable to force their way through at St Aubin and Lion-sur-Mer to link the two. Feuchtinger's artillery was on the ridge above the village of Périers, south of Hermanville and Lion, protecting the salient and providing a potential springboard for his counter-attack against either the British or Canadians.

Major General TG Rennie's British 3rd Infantry Division, having landed on Sword, was driving on Caen from the north, and Major General RFL Keller's Canadian 3rd Infantry Division, which had landed on Juno, from the north-west. Luckily for Feuchtinger, Rennie's division showed a complete lack of flare, having captured Hermanville, it dug in instead of trying to outflank the Germans at Périers. It did not reach 6th Airborne at the Bénouville Bridge until the end of the day and only got to within three miles of Caen. In the northern outskirts, the 21st Panzer found itself struggling through a tide of frightened French refugees.

Fortunately for Feuchtinger, the officer in charge of the division's Panzer Regiment 22 was a very able man. The 45-year-old Colonel Hermann von

Opplen-Bronikowski was a veteran of the First World War and the invasions of Poland, France and Russia. Feuchtinger had started the day with 124 tanks, but while manoeuvring from the south-west of Caen northwards to attack the invaders he lost 34 to Allied air attack and mechanical problems. By 1600, the British had reached Biéville, but beyond the village in Lebissey wood, just two and a half miles from Caen, they bumped into 40 panzers under von Opplen-Bronikowski.

Before the attack, Opplen-Bronikowski was briefed by General Erich Marcks, commander of 84th Corps, who placed him under no illusions about the seriousness of his mission. 'Opplen, the future of Germany may very well rest on your shoulders,' he said. 'If you don't push the British back to the sea, we've lost the war.'

Feuchtinger found the odds not to his liking: 'Once over the Orne river, I drove north towards the coast. By this time, the enemy, consisting of three British and three Canadian Infantry Divisions, had made astonishing progress and had already occupied a strip of high ground about six miles from the sea. From here, the excellent anti-tank gunfire of the Allies knocked out 11 of my tanks before I had barely started. However, one battle group did manage to bypass these guns and actually reached the coast at Lion-sur-Mer, at about seven in the evening.'

While Feuchtinger claimed he only had 70 tanks left by the end of the day,

the British only counted 20 abandoned panzers, with RAF Typhoon fighter-bombers claiming another six on the outskirts of Caen. Only six panzers and a handful of infantry made it as far as Lion-sur-Mer. Feuchtinger then tried to co-ordinate his efforts with the 12th SS Panzer Division. 'About midnight, Kurt Meyer [commander 12th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 25] arrived at my headquarters,' he recalled. 'He was to take over my left and we were to carry out a combined operation next morning. I explained the situation to Meyer and warned him about the strength of the enemy. Meyer studied the map, turned to me with a confident air and said "Little fish! We'll throw them back into the sea in the morning."'

By daybreak though, the British and Canadians had closed the gap and 21st Panzer had lost its golden opportunity to rupture the bridgehead. In reality, any attack would probably have been hemmed in and decimated by naval gunfire and Allied fighter-bombers. While Feuchtinger and Opplen-Bronikowski may have wrung their hands in despair over the lack of firm direction and lost time, they had thwarted the British securing Caen on day one of the invasion.

### **Crushed in spirits**

Although the 6th Airborne had valiantly secured the Allied left flank, the British 3rd Division had failed to take Caen, a major D-Day objective, thanks to the presence of 21st Panzer. Similarly, the Canadians failed to capture Carpiquet airfield, three miles west of Caen. The city itself was pivotal to the British breakout and all the time it remained in German hands it was an obstruction to Montgomery's plans. The fate of France and indeed Panzergruppe West now rested with the outcome of the battle for Caen and 21st Panzer's ability to hold onto it.

Kortenhaus was shocked at the rapid rate with which the division lost its tanks: 'My Company was under the control of Battlegroup von Luck. We made two attacks, one on 7 June and one on the 9th, and had a lot of losses – of our 17 tanks, only one survived. The rest were destroyed. That had a big effect on us, and we sat around afterwards very crushed in spirits. It was now clear to us that we weren't going to do it, we weren't going to push the Allies back. The Allied attacks were too strong, particularly because of their air superiority. There was hardly any chance of avoiding a bad ending. But when an order came to attack





Both Rommel and Montgomery knew the key strategic ground in Normandy lay to the east of Caen. The city became the scene of a number of bloody tank battles.

we still did it – it must been the same on the Allied side – because if a commander says, “Attack!” or “Tanks advance!” no one could say, “I am not doing it.”

Schweppenburg’s Panzergruppe West staff also found themselves involved in resisting the Allied invasion. ‘On the morning of 7 June,’ he recalled, ‘I was ordered to take over, with my staff, the sector on both sides of the Orne up to Tilly-sur-Suelles. I moved out immediately. After reaching Argentan, two conditions became evident, both of primary importance to the movement of Panzer forces. Enemy air action had thoroughly and skilfully destroyed those points along the main arteries where the roads narrowed within the defiles of villages and towns. Owing to the road net and the terrain, it was difficult even in daylight to find a bypass, and then only with considerable delay.’

Rommel must have felt equally frustrated that the chain of command for his panzers ran via Schweppenburg to von Rundstedt. He exercised direct control for barely three days. Pending the arrival of Panzergruppe West, as of 0400 on the 7th, the 1st SS Panzer Corps assumed command of 12th SS, 21st and Panzer

Lehr. Dietrich became responsible for 7th Army’s armoured counter-attack and was well aware that the burden of this operation would fall on the teenagers of the 12th SS (See MI/271).

Unfortunately, the staff of the SS Panzer Corps did nothing to clarify the situation for the divisional commanders. Although the Corps ordered an attack toward Courseulles-sur-Mer, in the event Panzer Lehr drifted toward Bayeux and the 12th SS moved north-west of Caen. At the time, 1st SS Panzer Corps was just starting its 438-mile journey from Belgium.

On 8 June, Schweppenburg found himself in command of the three Panzer Divisions. He was also given the coastal 716th Infantry Division, which he discovered (numbering just 300 men), only existed in the imagination of the higher staffs, as the rest had been swept away during the invasion. The general knew that time was of the essence: ‘I had been anxious not to interfere before. After visiting the combat divisions, I made a verbal report by telephone to the commander 7th Army. I informed him that I was prepared to attack at the earliest possible moment and requested a

free hand as to the time and place.’

The plan was to counter-attack along the Caen-Lion-sur-Mer road. However, 21st Panzer was tied up on the left bank of the Orne and could not be deployed as a divisional formation. The damaged bridge at Thury-Harcourt delayed Panzer Lehr and 12th SS was lacking its panzers. In the meantime, the Germans’ coastal defence had been pierced and the way south was clear for the Allies. During the night of 7 June, the British 50th Infantry Division took Bayeux and the following day the American 1st Infantry Division captured Tour-en-Bessin and Le Coudrai on the Bayeux-Isigny road.

Schweppenburg and his staff assessed, despite the success at Bayeux, that the British and Canadians would not launch a large-scale attack until thorough preparations had been made. In contrast, it was felt the Americans were less likely to be so cautious and therefore possibly constituted a greater threat, especially if they were to push into the gap between Panzergruppe West and 7th Army.

#### **German HQ decapitated.**

Schweppenburg was dismissive of Rommel’s urge to strike the Allies on the





**Ultimately the squabbling between Rommel, Hitler and his other commanders ensured that German panzers were unable to strike decisively against the Allies.**

beaches with the panzers. This would expose them to concentrated naval gunfire and fighter-bombers, in addition the existing forces were insufficient for such a task and vital fuel and ammunition stocks lay too far to the rear to assist rapid deployment. His fears were realised at 1000 hours, when the attack was launched. The 12th SS struggled to get south of Creully in the face of heavy naval bombardment. Panzer Lehr, lacking fuel, could only commit a battle group, while 21st Panzer could offer little help. Air support from the Luftwaffe was non-existent. Crucially, despite this the Germans were able to hold onto the vital roads leading to Caen.

Rommel pitched up at 1st SS Panzer Corps on 10 June to inform them that

47th Panzer Corps with two panzer divisions would be committed to their left and that Panzergruppe West would assume control between the Orne and the Vire rivers. Then in the afternoon, he visited Schweppenburg's command post. Allied intelligence knew that this HQ had moved northwest of Thury-Harcourt to the Chateau at La Caine, about 12 miles (20km) south-west of Caen on the 8th.

Intent on resisting the D-Day landings, Panzergruppe West became an operational combat command that day at chateau La Caine. Within two days, it had sealed its own fate. Allied signal intercepts from four large radio trucks parked in nearby trees were its undoing, tipping off the Allies' fighter-

bombers to its exact location. On the eve of the crucial battle for Normandy, Panzergruppe West ceased to function.

RAF Typhoons swooped down out of the skies onto a chateau and neighbouring orchard, followed by Mitchell light bombers of the 2nd Tactical Air Force. Surprised German radio operators and staff officers caught in the open scattered in all directions as the ground shook beneath them. When the prolonged raid was finally over, a German general lay dead along with 12 other fellow officers. In one fell swoop, Hitler's panzer forces in Normandy had been successfully decapitated.

Rommel narrowly missed the Allied air attack, which Schweppenburg recalled: 'About a half hour later, the command post of Panzergruppe West was subjected for several hours to severe bombing and strafing. All personnel of the operations section as well as most of the officers of the forward echelon were killed. The bulk of the vehicles and almost all the technical equipment of the signal battalion were destroyed, in spite of their thorough dispersion. Thus the staff could no longer function. Although I myself was slightly wounded, I was ordered to assemble and re-form the staff. Since this mission entailed working in Paris, I drove to Rommel and requested a new assignment at the front.'

Thanks to the squabbling between Rommel, Rundstedt, Schweppenburg and Hitler, Colonel Helmut Ritgen of the Panzer Lehr Division knew a golden opportunity had been thrown away: 'From 6 June onwards, 21st Panzer had been thrown piecemeal into battle to counter the British airborne landings. This armoured attack towards the shore was halted prematurely when the British paratroopers landed in our rear. On D-Day night, the British 1st Corps had captured a coastal strip six miles long though not yet very deep. In vain, the exhausted German defenders looked for reinforcements but all local reserves had been used up.'

In July, Rommel was knocked out of the fighting when his staff car was strafed by the Allies and he was wounded. Likewise, Hitler was distracted by the unsuccessful bomb plot on his life. In the following investigation, Rommel was implicated and to spare his family, he took his own life. Hitler had finally won his head to head with one of his most brilliant commanders. In the meantime, the battle for Normandy turned into a bloody slogging match in which the panzers were pinned down at every move •





Wellington and his staff  
crossing the Bidasoa river.

# Wellington's Greatest Attack

In 1813, Wellington smashed through the French defences on the River Nivelle in the Pyrenees. It was, claims ANDREW UFFINDELL, the biggest battle he ever fought.

**A**n hour before dawn, the men of the Light Division were in their jumping-off positions, ready to begin the assault. They lay on the ground, preserving strict silence so as not to alert the French piquets just half-a-musketshot away on the far side of a ravine. Such tense moments of waiting, decided Major Jonathan Leach of the 95th Rifles, were far more tormenting than actual combat. A soldier's musket suddenly went off by accident, and for an awful moment it

seemed that the French had discovered them, but all remained still, and they were able to breathe once more.

As many as 88,000 of Wellington's men were about to take the offensive, all along a vast, 16-mile front, with the Light Division in the centre. As the sky began to lighten, eyes strained to make out the French positions. It was difficult to tell the precise moment when night turned into day, but objects became progressively clearer, and everyone's eyes were directed to the east, watching for the first glimmer

of the morning sun, which was due to appear at 6.50 am.

'The sunrise in those regions is most sudden,' explained Lieutenant John Maclean of the 43rd (or the Monmouthshire) Regiment of Foot, 'for darkness is dispelled by a burst of glowing light as the sun clears the head of a high mountain, and startles the beholder with its glorious brightness'. The golden rays sparkled off bayonets, and then came the echoing boom of a gun, followed by two others in succession, as the long-awaited





**View from the Signals Redoubt. This was the stronghold captured by Lieutenant-Colonel John Colborne in the afternoon, at a heavy price.**

signal. No sooner had the third shot rung out, than the men were on their feet, and the first skirmishers were racing forward to cover the assault.

### **Freezing nights**

Five months earlier, Wellington had thrust over 250 miles right across northern Spain from the Portuguese frontier to the Pyrenees, inflicting a crushing defeat on the French at the city of Vitoria on the way. He had resumed the offensive on 7 October, crossing the Bidasoa river near the Atlantic coast to gain a shallow foothold up to four miles deep within France itself. Although successful, the attack left his army holding positions up in the Pyrenees, which was not the best place to be in late autumn. The troops had to endure freezing nights, rain lasting for days on end, and heavy snowfalls on the higher slopes.

‘The tents afforded but a bad protection,’ recalled Ensign Robert Batty of the 1st Regiment of Foot Guards, ‘as the wind beat the rain through the canvas, and rendered the interior almost untenable.’ He was on the left of the army, and knew that those units further to the right were in an even worse situation, as they were higher up, and exposed to greater changes in the temperature and to drizzly mists that hung almost constantly over the mountain summits. ‘The provisions, too, were far from being good,’ he added. ‘The cattle, driven up to the army through a great portion of Spain, arrived in a jaded and lean condition; the roads, along which they had been driven, might easily be traced by the numbers of their

carcasses, lying half buried at their sides.’

Small wonder that both desertion and mortality rates rose alarmingly. On one stormy night, the men of the 42nd (or the Royal Highland) Regiment of Foot were crouched around the dying embers of watch fires, soaked and numb with cold. ‘God grant that we may have a battle immediately,’ one of them exclaimed to his comrades, ‘or that I may soon be dead!’ Gales continually ripped and blew down the tents. ‘Day or night we were never dry,’ complained Major Leach of the 95th Rifles. ‘Springs bubbled up from the ground on which our tents stood, and we began to think it was really time to seek winter-quarters in more hospitable regions.’

Spending the winter up in the mountains was out of the question. Withdrawing the army back into Spain was equally unthinkable. Wellington’s only option was to break out of the Pyrenees and into the lower ground near Bayonne, where the capture of a French port would enable him to establish a new and shorter supply line. Once he had consolidated his hold on the Spanish frontier by starving the French garrison of Pamplona into surrender on 31 October, he was free to attack.

Where should he strike? He could repeat his stratagem of a month earlier, when he had stormed across the Bidasoa river near the coast. But the French commander, Marshal Jean-de-Dieu Soult, had fortified the coastal sector of his new position particularly heavily, and had too many troops there. As for launching the main attack against the other, eastern end of the French line, this was precluded by logistical difficulties and bad weather

high up in the mountains. That left an onslaught directed against the centre, supported by secondary thrusts further east, and facilitated by a feint attack in the west to keep Soult distracted.

### **Formidable fighting machine**

Wellington’s Peninsular victories are remembered today as British triumphs, yet fewer than half of the 88,000 troops he had available at the Nivelles were British or German, the majority being Spanish or Portuguese. The multi-national composition of his force gave him a comfortable numerical advantage over the 62,000 French troops opposed to him, and by keeping just one Portuguese infantry brigade as a general reserve, he committed as great a proportion as possible of his combat power to the actual offensive. He tilted the balance even further in his favour by resolving to distract and pin down the French western wing with no more than the same number of troops as Soult had deployed in that sector, namely around 26,000 or 27,000.

This meant that Wellington would be using just 30 per cent of his army to keep 44 per cent of Soult’s inactive. In the key, central sector, meanwhile, where the French had just 16,000 men, or 26 per cent of their total, Wellington would deploy 33,000 troops, or 38 per cent of his strength. It was a masterly demonstration of one of the most basic principles of war: concentration of force.

Repeated defeats and a demoralised, numerically inferior army had reduced Soult to the defensive, and led him to rely heavily on fortifications. But fixed defences immobilised too many of his men, leaving him unable to establish powerful, mobile reserves ready for immediate counter-attacks, and exposing his army to being beaten piecemeal. This was why Wellington was so confident, despite the apparent strength of the entrenchments confronting him.

‘These fellows think themselves invulnerable, but I will beat them out, and with great ease,’ he assured one of the Light Division’s brigade commanders, Lieutenant-Colonel John Colborne. When Colborne expressed surprise that the attack would be easy, Wellington explained that the French lacked enough men to defend their positions—he would be able to focus a greater force on key points than the French could collect to oppose him. By penetrating between redoubts, his divisions could isolate them, causing them to fall of their own accord, without the need for bloody, frontal assaults.

Constant reconnaissance by Wellington



Portrait of the Duke of Wellington, painted in 1814 by Sir Thomas Lawrence.





and his staff, combined with information received from subordinate formations, revealed the French strengths and weaknesses. The most vulnerable point was the gap in the mountain chain where the Nivelle river flowed through it on its way to the coast in the north-west. Low-lying ground near the river offered a chink in the French defences, like the vulnerable armpit in a suit of armour. By making one of his thrusts here, Wellington could breach the French position, and cause it to collapse on either side like a row of dominos as each of their long array of strongholds became untenable in turn. To make this point even more enticing, the river formed the boundary between the French centre and right wing, and the seizure of the Amotz bridge would severely hamper their communications.

By this stage in the war, Wellington delegated considerable initiative to his subordinate commanders. He had no option, given the increased size of his army. In terms of both the numbers of troops under his command and the extent of his front, the Nivelle was the biggest battle he ever fought. The nature of the terrain was another compelling reason for a more devolved command style.

‘The ground over which the affair was fought was so rugged that it would be difficult to attempt a sketch of it,’ explained the commander of the Royal Horse Artillery, Lieutenant-Colonel Augustus Frazer. ‘You must fancy rocks, and hills, and woods, and mountains, interspersed with rough heaths, and rivers, and every thing but plain ground.’ Wellington’s willingness to allow greater scope for initiative also reflected his increased confidence in the army he had gradually built up into a formidable military machine during five successive years of campaigning.

The attack was scheduled for dawn on 8 November, to give the army a full moon while moving into position the previous night. In the event, it had to be postponed a couple of days, since bad weather blocked the mountain tracks and prevented the right wing from coming forward in time. Soult expected to be attacked, but did not know exactly when or where.

‘I believe I will be able to repel the enemy’s attack,’ he wrote to the Minister of War on the 9th. ‘I am surprised it has still not occurred, for I assume that the preparations were completed yesterday, and so I am expecting to see his columns emerge at any moment. Everyone will be at his post before dawn tomorrow.’ But Soult’s main concern lay with both his wings, and that distracted him from the

real danger in the centre, meaning that Wellington would enjoy tactical surprise.

### Daunting task

The Light Division, part of Wellington’s powerful central punch, was entrusted with the most daunting task of all—seizing an outpost called the Lesser Rhune in front of the main French defensive line. It was a formidable position. Although Wellington had occupied the main mountain in the vicinity, the Greater Rhune, a month earlier, the French still retained its smaller sister, which lay 1,200 yards further north. Its crest formed a jagged spine of rocks extending more than 700 yards from west to east.

Too steep to be attacked from the south, it could be assailed only from the west, and the assaulting force would have to work its way up and along the narrow, rocky summit, which the French had blocked with three successive strongholds, the last of which – dubbed ‘the Donjon’ – was the strongest and loftiest of them all. For a whole month the French had been working on these forts, skilfully exploiting the rocky crags to create an imposing position whose natural and man-made elements merged almost seamlessly into one.

To supplement these defences, the French had erected others on the northern side of the Lesser Rhune. On a little plateau below its summit stood the Mouiz redoubt, built in the shape of a star with dry stone walls around six feet high. Additional earthworks strengthened this position, including a 350-yard long traverse to defend the dip in the ground between the redoubt and the mountain crest. The area the attackers would have to cross in order to reach these defences was bare of any trees or bushes to offer cover from French fire. They would have to rely on speed and surprise to keep their casualties to a minimum.

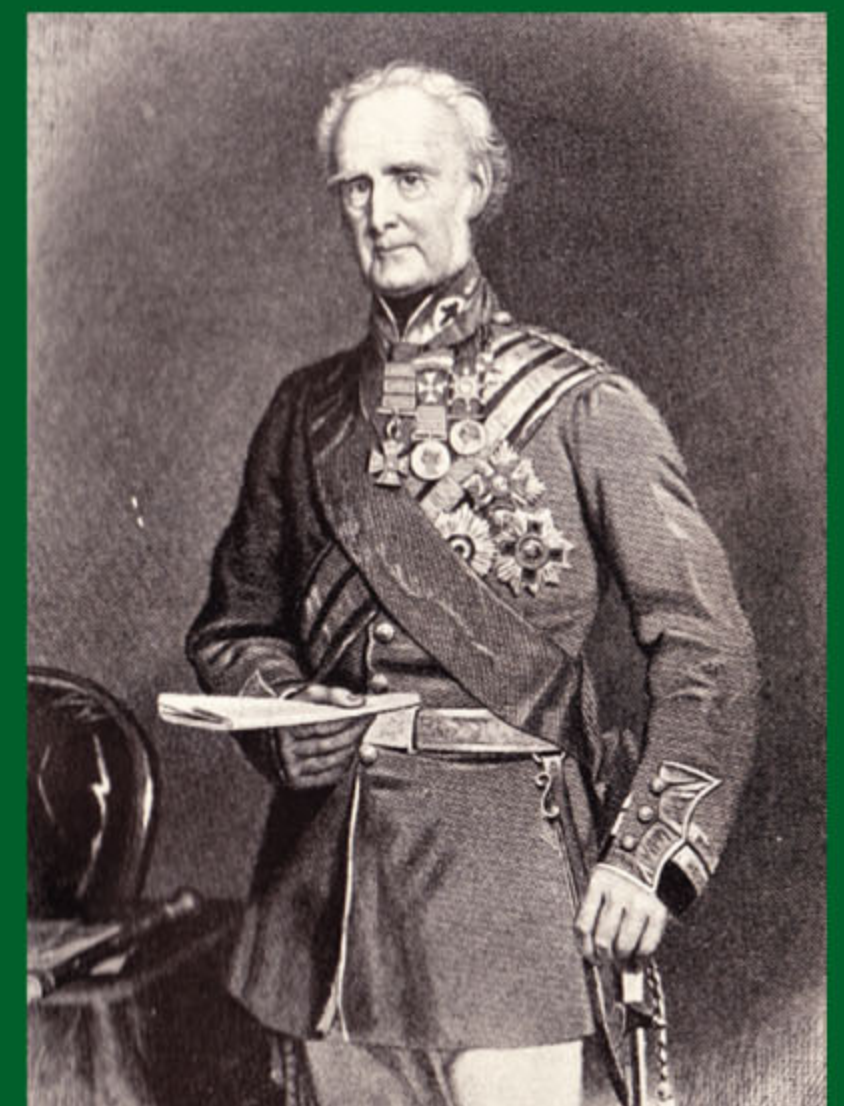
The French had four battalions holding this complex of fortifications. Yet for all its apparent strength, the Lesser Rhune was a trap, since the steep and rocky slopes made it difficult for the defenders either to reinforce or evacuate their troops. The French had not logically thought through the implications of holding the position. Four battalions were too few to check a serious attack, and yet too many to be sacrificed if all that was intended at this point was a mere delaying action. Besides, as the British commanders had spotted, the Mouiz redoubt could be outflanked to the north.

The French vulnerabilities, and Wellington’s overall plan for exploiting

them, were known only to generals and staff officers. To more lowly men, the venture seemed hazardous and likely to be extremely costly. That night, 19-year-old Lieutenant Edward Freer of the 43rd Regiment had a premonition that he would be killed. He was a bold and popular young officer, but was in tears thinking of the effect of his death on his mother and sisters, and had to be comforted by his battalion commander.



Major William Napier, who led the 43rd Regiment.



Lieutenant-Colonel John Colborne, one of the heroes of the Light Division. He rose to become Field Marshal Lord Seaton, and is seen here in old age.

Yet Ensign George Bell of the 34th (or the Cumberland) Regiment of Foot dismissed any idea that such anxieties were widespread. ‘Few people, I fear, ever thought of danger or death, heaven or hell,’ he wrote. ‘Death was too familiar





British infantry attack uphill.

### Crack formation

The Light Division was a crack formation of almost 5,000 men. Wellington habitually used it for especially difficult missions, whether it was screening his army, acting as a rearguard, or storming the breaches of a fortress. It contained two brigades, both commanded by experienced and respected leaders – Major-General James Kempt and Lieutenant-Colonel John Colborne. The backbone in each of these two formations was a British light infantry battalion—the 43rd Regiment for Kempt’s Brigade, and the 52nd for Colborne’s. Each brigade also contained another three battalions to provide support – a combination of Portuguese infantry and the 95th Rifles.

to be looked on with terror, and made no impression. I never saw a Bible nor do I remember ever seeing any one read the Bible... We never thought that the time was short and the soul precious, where the man spared in the battle of today was killed on the morrow. I don’t say that men did not pray, but I never saw but one on his knees.’ Indeed, another subaltern, Lieutenant George Simmons of the 95th Rifles, recorded that joy was the overwhelming reaction in his unit on the eve of the battle, after it received the order for the impending attack. ‘We spent a jovial evening, singing and dancing until 12 o’clock.’

Wellington himself was confident. Already he had received vague reports of Napoleon’s disastrous defeat at Leipzig in central Europe at the hands of the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians. ‘I entertain no doubt, from the accounts which I have received from the interior, that the French have sustained a terrible defeat in Germany,’ he wrote at noon on 9 November. His Deputy Judge-Advocate-General, Frances Larpent, dined with him that evening. ‘He was all gaiety and spirits,’ Larpent recalled, ‘and only said

on leaving the room, Remember! at four in the morning.’

### Bullet-stopping biscuit

In the early hours of 10 November, the men of the Light Division prepared to march to their jumping-off positions. Immediately before moving out, Lieutenant Maclean of the 43rd ate a hearty breakfast with his comrades, and later recalled how one of them, Lieutenant Wyndham Madden, examined a biscuit, and joked that it was thick enough to stop a musketball. Madden put it inside the breast of his jacket, an act that would save his life early in the battle when he was hit by French fire—the biscuit was shattered, but deflected the ball away from his heart.

Major-General James Kempt used a track to take the 1st Brigade forward. In contrast, Colborne took the 2nd Brigade along a shorter, though less obvious, cross-country route, which saved his men some hours of marching, but required extra vigilance to prevent them from getting lost in the darkness. He and his Brigade-Major, Captain Harry Smith, had reconnoitred the way, and knew every bush and stone. Colborne stayed near the Brigade, and sent Smith ahead from spot to spot. Once Colborne had come up and checked that it was the right place, Smith would go on again, and thus they steadily worked their way forward. Colborne paid for this short-cut with some tense moments. ‘I had a desperate fright on the road’, he related. In the darkness, an ADC suddenly brought news that a captain had gone astray, and was leading his company directly towards the French lines. Colborne had to gallop instantly to the errant unit, and turn it back in the right direction.

Before dawn, both brigades had reached their assigned positions. They had moved forward to the last fold in the ground that could hide them from the French, and now snatched some final rest. Covered by their blankets, they were difficult to spot even at a short distance. Lieutenant John Cooke of the 43rd Regiment could see nothing except slabs of rock where Colborne’s Brigade lay. But then, as if by magic, the rocks suddenly began moving, and in the growing light turned into soldiers. Another officer saw a column of the 95th Rifles lying on the ground, covered by their white blankets, and looking, in the gloom, just like a flock of sheep.

Despite earlier concerns about the possibility of fog, it was a fine and clear morning, with barely a cloud in the sky, although a sharp wind whistled over the exposed mountain slopes. Then at last came the signal to attack, and the long

moments of tension were over. ‘Now, 43rd, let me see what you will do this morning,’ exclaimed Major-General Kempt, pointing the way to the Lesser Rhune.

Carried away by the excitement of the moment, a sergeant-major gave an altogether more dramatic address than his brigade commander. Drawing his sword with a flourish, he flung aside the scabbard, and turned to his men. ‘Soldiers! We have not had an opportunity of distinguishing ourselves since the siege of Badajoz,’ he exclaimed with a flurry of gestures. ‘I must remind you in the words of the immortal Nelson, England expects that every man this day will do his duty – then follow me to victory!’

A derisive laugh answered this pompous speech, but the leading skirmishers were already dashing down the slope. What followed was among the finest episodes in the history of the 43rd, and it was therefore fitting that the unit was led by Major William Napier, one of its most famous sons. He vividly described both the excitement of the attack, and the intense frustration he experienced in trying to control it. Deploying two companies as skirmishers to try and suppress the fire from the first fort of the Lesser Rhune, he had the rest of the regiment advance at the double. He personally led an assault force of four companies, while leaving the remaining four to follow as a reserve, for he knew that his men were bound to become dispersed during the fighting amid the rocks, and would then be vulnerable to a possible counter-attack.

### Throwing heavy stones

So intense was the French fire that Napier had trouble preventing his men from breaking into a charge. Their keenness to close with their enemy, and thus put an end to the hail of shots, was understandable, but Napier was resolved not to let them run too soon, or they would reach the French strongholds out of breath and in no state to assault them. They had over half-a-mile of broken ground to cover, and were burdened with heavy knapsacks, muskets, and equipment.

Unfortunately, an ADC of the brigade commander, Captain the Hon Charles Gore, burst on to the scene, galloping up behind the 43rd, waving his hat and calling for a charge, with all the impetuosity of a young staff officer. ‘The men instantly cheered and ran forward,’ recalled Napier. ‘It was in vain to try, and would have been dangerous, to stop them, and I could only make the best of the matter.’ He therefore joined the dash himself, and was the second man to reach the rocks, being





A soldier serving in a line battalion of the King's German Legion.

outraced by the tallest and fittest soldier of the regiment.

But Napier's earlier concern was now justified. 'The men were quite blown,' he wrote, 'and fell down in the rocks within a few yards of the first castle, from whence the enemy plied them with a heavy musketry. When they had recovered wind I advanced against the first castle, leading the way with one man: the enemy fled, with the exception of an officer and two of his men; but, aided by my own man I scaled the wall. We put the two men to flight, and wounded and took the officer, for he fought to the last, standing on the wall and throwing heavy stones at me. One I parried with my sword, but I received a contusion in the thigh from another.'

Whereas Napier described the attack on this first fort as a purely heroic feat, one of

his officers, Lieutenant Maclean, recalled an incident that bordered on the comic. 'Napier, boiling with courage, and being withall very active, attempted to scale the walls without observing the bayonet points over his head,' he wrote, 'and, being rather short-sighted, would certainly have been very roughly handled had not [Lieutenant] James Considine and myself laid hold of the skirts of his jacket and pulled him back, for which we received anything but thanks. We of course apologised to Colonel Napier for the liberty we had taken, for he was very wrath at the time. We then pointed out an easier ascent for him, and assisted each other over the wall.'

After a brief rest, the 43rd stormed onwards, up against the second fort. Their leading men were soon over the walls, and found once again that although some of

the Frenchmen fought heroically, others quickly fled. A little, red-headed soldier of the 43rd chased an officer in an attempt to take him prisoner, and actually hurled his firelock through the air, bringing his quarry down to the ground with a thud, with the bayonet and its attached musket still sticking in the man's thigh.

Once more, the 43rd's officers had led the assault, with a couple of them even using the muskets of fallen soldiers. Napier himself was engaged at such close quarters that his clothes were scorched all over the front from the French musketry. But the price for such valour was high: one in every four of his officers was killed or wounded that day, compared to just one in 13 of the men.

Napier now had just the final fort, the Donjon, still to take, but his men had become dispersed and mixed up, and a 15-foot deep gully separated him from his objective. He tried to rally a handful of troops, but then heard a shout from one of his lieutenants that the garrison of the Donjon was wavering, and so, casting aside caution, he immediately seized his chance, and dashed forward with those soldiers he had at hand.

By now, the entire French position was collapsing, the garrison of the Donjon joined the rout, and Napier was able to occupy the stronghold with minimal casualties. Yet he found himself unable to exploit his success and trap the French fugitives, since his four reserve companies had joined the fighting. 'How or why my reserve was dispersed, so contrary to my orders, and without any apparent necessity, I never could learn,' he fumed.

Meanwhile, the Light Division's other attacks had also been successful. Colborne with the 52nd (or the Oxfordshire) Regiment of Foot had boldly outflanked the entire defensive complex by circling round the Mouiz redoubt to the north. The 95th Rifles and Portuguese battalions screened the 52nd's attack, and linked it with that of the 43rd. It was the threat of being cut off that caused the French resistance suddenly to crumble, before the 43rd had even begun to assault the Donjon. By 8.00am, less than half-an-hour after the onslaught had begun, both the Lesser Rhune and the adjacent Mouiz plateau were in Wellington's hands.

The storming of the Lesser Rhune in such a swift stroke was undeniably a brilliant feat of arms, and it speaks volumes about the experience and professionalism of Wellington's army. The meticulous planning, the prior reconnaissance, and the careful approach at night to ensure surprise, were as





The dry stonewalls of the Mouiz redoubt, with the Lesser Rhune in the background.

important as the boldness of the actual assault, or the heroic leadership by the officers. The outcome was also due to Wellington's skill in bringing to bear such a devastating superiority of numbers. Against this outpost position, he had concentrated an entire division that outnumbered the 2,500 defenders by two to one.

### Furious tide

The Lesser Rhune lay nearly one and half miles in front of the main French position. Its capture, along with that of a couple of other outposts by divisions further east, marked the successful completion of the first phase of Wellington's attack. The Light Division remained for two or three hours on the conquered height to give the other divisions time to work their way forward. From this lofty viewpoint, Major Leach of the 95th Rifles watched the progress of the battle in awe. 'It is impossible,' he wrote, 'to conceive a finer sight than the general advance of our army from the Pyrenean passes against the French position. Almost as far as the eye could reach, was seen one sheet of flame and smoke, accompanied with an incessant fire of light troops, and frequent

volleys of musketry, as the lines and columns approached the entrenchments.'

Covered by swarms of skirmishers, the attacking divisions punched through the French position. 'The tide of war now rolled furiously onwards,' wrote Sergeant John Cooper of the 7th (or the Royal Fusiliers) Regiment of Foot, 'and the advance of our troops on the right, driving the enemy from hedge to hedge, and from wall to wall, was really brilliant. If there was a stop for a moment or two, the next thing was a run and a cheer.' There were some extraordinary acts of courage on both sides. Ensign Bell of the 34th Regiment remembered an insanely brave French battalion commander, riding far in front of his men, leading them on, waving them forward with his cocked hat, only to tumble off his horse as he was picked off by a musketshot.

Having rested following its capture of the Lesser Rhune, the Light Division advanced to join the attack on the French main position, only to suffer a tragic setback. One of the French fortifications, the Signals Redoubt, was perched on top of a steep hill. It would, in fact, have fallen of its own accord, as it was about to be bypassed on either side, and the garrison

was bound to abandon it shortly. But a misunderstanding involving a staff officer resulted in Colborne making a direct attack with the 52nd Regiment, only to be repelled twice on coming up against its strong defences.

Colborne then resorted to psychological warfare. Ordering a bugler to sound a parley, he waved his white handkerchief, gallantly approached the gate of the redoubt, and summoned the garrison to surrender. 'I was never in such peril in my whole life,' he later recalled, 'but thinking the boldest plan was the best, I waved my handkerchief and called out loudly to the French leader on the other side of the wall, "What nonsense this is, attempting to hold out! You see you are surrounded on every side. There are Spaniards on the left; you had better surrender at once!"'

The French feared being massacred if they fell into Spanish hands. It was now a test of nerves. After protesting that Colborne was trying to address his men directly, and incite them to abandon him, the French commander seemed to hesitate and finally gave in. His garrison consisted of a battalion of the French 88th Regiment of Line Infantry, whose men openly cursed at finding themselves





The Nivelle river, and the bridge of Amotz. This was the most vulnerable point of the French position.

prisoners. It is hard not to sympathise with the sergeant, decorated with the cross of the Légion d'honneur, who ranted about being captured in a '-bastard redoubt', after having been present at the splendid victories of Austerlitz and Wagram.

But the attack had been unnecessary, and had taken a heavy toll on the 52nd. It lost 240 men killed or wounded that day – over half the casualties suffered by the Light Division as a whole. For the 52nd, the battle of the Nivelle was bloodier even than Waterloo. The episode showed the strength of Soult's fortifications, and what would have happened on a wider scale if Wellington had attacked in a less skilful manner, or with a less disciplined and experienced army.

### Lost opportunity

Once he had smashed through the hard crust of the French position, Wellington had hoped to exploit his success with an immediate thrust north-westwards to the sea, in order to trap the western wing before it could escape. But with sunset at that time of year coming as early as 4.40pm, he lacked enough time for such a bold stroke, and his divisions were tired after their hard marching and

fighting over difficult terrain. The French resistance had imposed too great a delay, and Wellington was wary of taking unnecessary risks. The opportunity was therefore missed, and heavy rain during the week that followed the battle made the roads so bad that military operations ground to a halt.

Wellington lost over 2,600 of his British and Portuguese troops at the Nivelle – a mercifully small total for breaking through such a tough position, but one that hid the fact that the cost was unevenly distributed. Not only had the heaviest losses been taken by the crack Light Division, but an unusually high proportion of the army's casualties consisted of officers. Success had depended on skill, boldness, and tight control, and that required a high degree of personal leadership. Two generals, both of them brigade commanders, were wounded, and the commanders of the 40th, 57th, 87th, 94th, and 95th Regiments were also hit.

'My head is actually turning round with the misery I suffer from the death of some of my friends,' wrote Major William Napier to his wife. Among them was Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Lloyd, the promising young commander of the

94th (or the Scotch Brigade) Regiment of Foot. 'What misery, that the very number of my losses have left me hardly a point to fix upon to rest my grief!' Napier lamented. 'Poor Lloyd! this is the deepest; but I cannot understand that every friend is dead – that five people whom I loved, and spoke to in health but a few hours back, should be all dead or dying. How little should I feel the value of living longer myself if it were not for you!'

Even so, the Nivelle was a clear-cut victory, and stunning proof of the degree to which Wellington's army possessed the priceless advantage of self-confidence. The battle had not seen the swift, sweeping manoeuvres of Salamanca, nor the relentless, spectacular advance that had preceded Vitoria, yet it rarely receives the full attention it deserves. As a painstakingly planned, set piece offensive, it was a masterpiece of tactical skill. Wellington himself had no doubt about his achievement. One evening in January 1814, he was dining with a visiting politician, the Under-Secretary of State for War, who asked him which of his victories he considered the best planned and executed. 'Well,' came the reply, 'I think the battle of the Nivelle was my best work.' •



De Gaulle was dubbed 'Joan of Arc' by Churchill and many saw him as rude and arrogant.



# De Gaulle's Army

With France prostrate under the Nazi jackboot, CHARLES STUART reveals how Charles de Gaulle raised an army from scratch to liberate his homeland.





French troops march into Nazi captivity. The rapid collapse of the French Army in the summer of 1940 was a paralysing blow to French national pride.

**T**he defeat of France at the hands of Nazi Germany was swift and humiliating. The very strong, but poorly led, French Army exhausted its reserves trying to stem Adolf Hitler's relentless armoured Blitzkrieg and was simply unable to defend Paris. In a desperate attempt to slice through Hitler's spearhead on 17 May 1940, Colonel Charles de Gaulle, with about three tank battalions, launched an unsuccessful counterattack at Montcornet. Despite this gallant effort, it was only a matter of time before the inevitable French collapse.

### Arrogant and rude

After the fall of the French capital, resistance could easily have continued from France's vast colonial empire, but Vichy politics were such that it had no desire to side with the Allies and jeopardise its position with Hitler. Indeed, Marshal Henri-Phillipe Petain and his supporters in Vichy saw their role purely to safeguard the unoccupied Free Zone in Southern France from Hitler and protect the integrity of France's colonies in Northwest Africa, the Middle East and Indo-China.

This effectively meant that Vichy's interests in North Africa posed a threat to Britain's vulnerable position in Egypt. The French colonies tended to be a law unto themselves, while the colonial forces and locally raised

troops operated independently of the Metropolitan French Army. Under the right leadership, it could have been easy to defy Vichy but this did not happen – the colonies remained loyal to the new French Government. Vichy's feeble policy of 'wait and see' suited Hitler perfectly fine, for unless he could neutralise the powerful French fleet he had no real way of dealing with the French Empire and the considerable military forces stationed there. The reality was that Hitler's fleet was far too small to tackle the French or British navies.

In the wake of the French armistice, Charles de Gaulle fled to London and, based in Carlton Gardens, optimistically proclaimed a 'Free France.' Ironically and perhaps appropriately, Carlton Gardens lay between Downing Street and the Vichy Consulate in Bedford Square, symbolising the uneasy position of the Free French. To the west of de Gaulle's HQ, lay the Union des Français d'Outre Mer, an anti-Vichy but not pro-de Gaulle organisation located in Upper Brook Street. De Gaulle was effectively 'piggy in the middle.' By his own admission, he had one strategy— intransigence. He had nothing to bargain with, so he saw no point in bargaining. This translated into what his allies saw as arrogance and rudeness.

His colleagues despised him and

virtually all the other senior French officers who had escaped denounced de Gaulle as an upstart. Even British Prime Minister Winston Churchill contemptuously dubbed him 'Joan of Arc' and American President Franklin D Roosevelt became alarmed at the prospect of de Gaulle being permitted to foist a dictatorship on a liberated France. The activities of de Gaulle's secret service organisation based in Duke Street soon became a source of embarrassment to Churchill as de Gaulle sought to enforce his writ over his fellow exiles.

While Churchill recognised de Gaulle as leader of the Free French at the end of June 1940, this did not mean he was granted the status of head of the French Government in exile. Petain in Vichy was the official legal head of the French Government, and the British Foreign Office feared Churchill's backing of de Gaulle would push Petain further into Hitler's arms. Instead of assembling the considerable resources of the French Navy and Empire to help oust Hitler, Vichy wanted to do nothing to provoke him.

Crucially, de Gaulle lacked a power base with which to rival Vichy and had no viable army in exile. Churchill's Operation Dynamo, from 27 May-4 June 1940, evacuated 224,320 British and another 141,842 Allied troops, principally French, from northern France and Dunkirk (though up to 40,000 French soldiers were left behind). French military morale was in disarray and France had yet to surrender on the 21st, so for most evacuated French troops there seemed little point in remaining in Britain.

Indeed, many were given no choice in the matter and were ferried home via Normandy or Morocco to help stabilise the situation on the Seine, Lower Normandy and the Marne. Not all were keen to go, as it was apparent that France could not hold out much longer, but by the end of June 1940, of those rescued, only 45,000 remained in Britain. After Dunkirk, the authorities removed 8,000 men, mostly refugees, from French vessels in British waters and they were interned at Aintree near Liverpool to await transport to Casablanca.

### Insult to Royal Navy

The powerful French fleet remained out of Hitler's and de Gaulle's grasp. In the waters of French Northwest Africa at Mers-el-Kebir in Algeria, the naval base at Oran, were two powerful French battleships, a light aircraft carrier, four cruisers, six heavy destroyers and various smaller vessels and submarines. Two





**France lost all of its tanks, such as this Renault B1, to Hitler's crushing Blitzkrieg. Vichy was not allowed any armour under the armistice and few tanks remained in France's colonies.**

other incomplete battleships had taken refuge at Casablanca and Dakar. There were six cruisers at Algiers, while moored at the naval base at Toulon were over 70 vessels. Off the Egyptian coast, at British controlled Alexandria, there was also a French battleship and four cruisers. Had such resources come over to the Free French cause, de Gaulle would have been elevated to major player status.

Churchill was also very anxious about the fate of these warships. Ideally, they should have joined the Royal Navy and continued the war against Hitler in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, but it was not to be. The French Fleet was loyal to Vichy. Lacking options, the Royal Navy struck Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July 1940, killing 1,299 Frenchmen and wounding another 350. At the same time, armed boarding parties stormed all the French warships in British harbours.

An outraged Vichy, under Marshal Petain, closed ranks, determined more than ever not to cooperate with Churchill or Charles de Gaulle. Churchill knew the Anglo-French alliance was completely in tatters when the bulk of the remaining French troops evacuated to Britain chose repatriation rather than join the Free French. This was a particular insult to the Royal Navy who had shed so much blood

saving them from Hitler's Blitzkrieg.

Not surprisingly, no French sailors wanted to join de Gaulle's Free French either. At the end of July, 1,100 sailed from Southampton on the French passenger ship Meknes bound for unoccupied France. A German torpedo boat sank her with the loss of 400 lives and Churchill was again blamed. In total, some 30,000 sailors and soldiers chose repatriation by the end of the year. This mass exodus showed just how unpopular de Gaulle and his cause were. This was a bitter blow to his Free French cause.

At this stage of the war, French resistance to Nazi occupation was quite frankly a joke – the nation was still too stunned. Those rallying to de Gaulle were pitifully few in number; by August 1940 he had at most 3,000 men gathered at Aldershot. By the following November, the Free French Navy numbered just 4,126. To the embarrassment of de Gaulle, the Czech, Polish and Norwegian exiled forces could muster almost as many men as him. Also in Britain were 2,720 French wounded, plus 7,547 men from the French Navy and merchant navy who were rounded up and placed in makeshift camps in the North and Midlands. These were poor recruiting grounds.

Even volunteers of foreign extraction

coming to Britain to fight for the Free French were given a very cold reception by the authorities. Chilean pilot Margot Duhalde, arriving in May 1941 with 12 of her countrymen, was immediately arrested. 'Scotland Yard was waiting for us,' she recalled. Ironically, the Free French, who had no use for women pilots, eventually handed her over to the British Air Transport Auxiliary.

Again, when the French colonies of Lebanon and Syria were finally placed under Free French command in July 1941, the bulk of the garrison forces chose repatriation rather than join de Gaulle. Out of 37,736 men, just 5,668 signed up and then only 1,046 were native Frenchmen (the rest were mainly Germans or Russians from the Foreign Legion, North Africans or Senegalese).

Publicly, Churchill was all for protecting France's imperial status, even if it meant supporting de Gaulle. In late 1941, he wrote to President Roosevelt: 'Our relations with General de Gaulle and the Free French movement will require to be reviewed. Hitherto the United States have entered into no undertakings similar to those comprised in my correspondence with him. Through no particular fault of his own movement [he] has created new antagonism in





Although France's colonial forces operated independently of the Metropolitan French Army they remained loyal to Vichy and spurned de Gaulle's advances.



Despite secret negotiations with France's colonial generals, French armour in Northwest Africa resisted the Allied landings in November 1942.

French minds. Any action which the United States may now feel able to take in regard to him should have the effect, inter alia, of redefining our obligations to him and France so as to make these obligations more closely dependent upon the eventual effort by him and the French nation to rehabilitate themselves.'

By 1942, Churchill and Roosevelt hoped that French General Henri Giraud, who had escaped imprisonment by the Germans, would rise up against Vichy, supported by Generals Charles Emmanuel Mast in Algeria and Emile Béthouart in Morocco. Even so, in September, General Dwight Eisenhower warned his military planners about the risk of the French Army resisting the proposed Allied

landings in Northwest Africa. De Gaulle commanded no loyalty there.

### Severe headache

French Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were a severe headache for Churchill, attempting to contain initially Benito Mussolini's and then joint Italian-German attacks on British controlled Egypt. Once France was out of the war, Mussolini was able to act with impunity against British interests in North Africa, secure in the knowledge that there was no threat to Libya's western border from French troops in Tunisia. Therefore, the Allied plan to trap Axis forces fighting in Libya was reliant on the co-operation of French Northwest Africa. The problem

was that Petain, supported by Admiral Jean Francois Darlan, commanded far greater respect than the upstart Charles de Gaulle's Free French.

Early on 8 November 1942, Petain was informed that Britain and America had invaded French Northwest Africa. He faced a difficult choice, fight and defend that which he had sought to preserve, or acquiesce to the Allies' demands. Petain made his decision and broke off diplomatic relations with America, warning the US charge d'affaires that his forces would fight the Anglo-American invasion.

At Oran, despite stiff resistance, American armoured units penetrated the port by 1000 hours and at noon the French garrison surrendered. Unknown to the Allies, Admiral Darlan was in Algiers visiting his ill son. This completely compromised General Alphonse Juin, Algiers French Military Commander, who had planned to side with the Allies. Instead the French garrisons at Algiers and Casablanca resisted the Allied advance. They also resisted the landings at the Moroccan Atlantic port of Safi. The French military was split down the middle by this crisis.

Darlan ordered a ceasefire two days later, only to have it overruled by Petain. However, continued resistance was futile and Darlan reached an agreement with the Allies on the 13th, in which the French colonies would be treated as friendly sovereign territory rather than occupied soil. If the French military had co-operated with de Gaulle, the Allies could have pushed into Tunisia within two days of the landings in Algeria. Instead, Hitler struck eastward from Tunis, successfully safeguarding his panzers' passage from Libya into Tunisia. Under the Franco-Italian armistice, Mussolini had imposed a 50-mile demilitarised zone between Libya and Tunisia, but this counted for nothing as German and Italian tanks were soon crossing to secure their exposed western flank.

Ironically, Juin, as commander of all Vichy forces in French North Africa, had fallen out with General de Lattre de Tassigny, over how best to defend Tunisia from Axis incursions should the British win in Libya. De Lattre had wanted to conduct a forward defence, but Juin knew that this could expose Algeria. He also knew that to bring forward reinforcements from Morocco and Algeria would violate the armistice with Hitler. Their best hope lay in holding the hills to maintain a foothold and screen Algeria. In January 1942, de Lattre was sacked and posted to Vichy France.





**Prime Minister Winston Churchill was far more tolerant of de Gaulle than President Roosevelt, who saw him as a threat to French democracy.**



**Once in Algiers, de Gaulle swiftly took charge of the French Committee of National Liberation.**

De Lattre was clearly not a Gaullist, having commanded the Montpellier region under the Vichy regime, but he was arrested for planning to oppose the German take over of the unoccupied zone, only managing to escape to Britain in September 1943. De Lattre faced two problems: even before 1940, he had not seen eye to eye with de Gaulle, and, secondly, what could he usefully do for the Free French cause?

### **Gallant warrior**

Tragically, the Allies inability to extend the landings eastward into Tunisia was a major failing of Operation Torch. In the port of Tunis, Admiral Jean Pierre Esteva, Resident General in Tunisia, though loyal to Darlan and Vichy, was privately sympathetic to the Allies. Nevertheless, he simply did not have the resources with which to obstruct the Germans who began to arrive in force by air on 9 November. A quarter of the French garrison remained loyal to Vichy and did nothing to impede this German invasion. At Bizerte, some Vichy French units even joined the Germans.

The French ground forces commander, General George Barre, withdrew with about five battalions into the mountains west of Tunis and toward the Allies in Algiers, while other French troops moved into the Grande Dorsale. General Juin's Detachement d'Armée Française (DAF), some 30,000 strong, consisting of Barre's weak division, a division raised in the Constantine area and some Saharan units, was assigned the two Dorsale ranges. Their job was to prevent the Germans penetrating the Tebessa area of Algeria

and to cover the right flank of the British for the forthcoming Tunisian campaign.

Churchill publicly put his faith in de Gaulle and Giraud at Mansion House, London on 10 November 1942: 'While there are men like General de Gaulle and all those who follow him – and they are legion throughout France – and men like General Giraud, that gallant warrior whom no prison can hold, while there are men like those to stand forward in the name and in the cause of France, my confidence in the future is clear.'

Pétain, on the other hand, was done for. Hitler's response to the Allied landing in French Northwest Africa was swift and predictable – his troops rolled into the Free Zone in the South of France on 11 November 1942. Despite Hitler's assurances to Pétain about the safety of the French Navy on the 27th, his forces attacked the naval base at Toulon. The loss of the fleet was a blow to French national pride as was Toulon itself. Pétain's efforts to safeguard the rump French state meant he would go down in history as a traitor.

Vitally, there were 100,000 French troops in Morocco and Tunisia and these would help de Gaulle consolidate his position. He was now presented with a golden opportunity to establish a power base and an army of his own. Following the invasion, he moved his HQ to Algiers and appointed General Pierre Koenig as head of the French military mission in London.

When Admiral Darlan was assassinated on 24 December 1942, Giraud became his successor as the civil and military chief of French Northwest Africa. He then upset the Allies by ordering the arrest of

a number of Frenchmen who had aided Operation Torch. Giraud met Roosevelt, Churchill and de Gaulle at Casablanca in January 1943. During the meeting, it was agreed that both he and de Gaulle would become co-presidents of the French Committee of National Liberation (FCNL). When de Gaulle arrived in Algeria on 30 May, he soon used his superior political skills to become sole leader of the organization. Grudgingly, Churchill recognised the FCNL on 27 August 1943.

Roosevelt pointedly stated after the invasion of French Northwest Africa, 'The future French Government will be established not by any individual in metropolitan France or overseas but by the French people themselves after they have been set free by the victory of the United Nations.' This warning could only be aimed at de Gaulle. Notably Operation Overlord would involve just one French division and Dragoon just three, military capabilities aside, de Gaulle's army would take a backseat.

As far as Roosevelt was concerned, de Gaulle was not a viable player—he had no resources or popular appeal. Free French operations against Dakar and Syria had shown that his involvement could be counterproductive. The man was haughty and aloof. Churchill tried to accommodate him, Roosevelt did not. The American President was convinced that de Gaulle was a potential dictator who would seek to maintain the French Empire and would obstruct any American aspirations to free the North African Arab states of French colonial rule. Indeed, Roosevelt promised the Sultan of





General Leclerc (see here on the left) was an ardent de Gaulle supporter and commanded the Free French 2nd Armoured Division.



Following the 'liberation' of French Northwest Africa, General Giraud raised eight divisions two of which were staunchly Gaullist. They would play key roles in the liberation of France.

Morocco freedom once the war was over.

The extent of de Gaulle's 'growing' popularity was exposed on 21 April 1943, when there was an attempt on his life. The Wellington bomber flying him to Glasgow was sabotaged at Hendon airfield. Luckily for de Gaulle, the pilot detected the elevator controls had been cut just before take-off and aborted the flight. At the time, the incident was hushed up and blamed on German intelligence but de Gaulle never flew by plane in Britain again. He must have viewed it as a clear warning.

When America learned that anti-Gaullist politicians in France were being betrayed to the Gestapo, an exasperated Roosevelt wrote to Churchill on 17 June 1943: 'I am absolutely convinced that he [de Gaulle] has been and is now injuring our war effort and that he is a very dangerous threat to us.' A year later, Roosevelt, annoyed at being dubbed anti-de Gaulle by the newspapers, wrote to his Chief of Staff General George Marshall somewhat sarcastically stating: 'I am perfectly willing to have de Gaulle made President, or Emperor, or King or anything else so long as the action comes in an untrammelled and unforced way from the French people themselves.' It was obvious that he regarded de Gaulle as an undemocratic threat to France—it was, after all, to counter such politics that he was committing the American Army to the Second Front.

### Poaching recruits

General de Lattre's greatest desire was a field command and he was soon lobbying the British, Americans and Free

French to create a French Army in North Africa. After a short stay in hospital for a damaged lung, he flew to Algiers to see de Gaulle and Giraud. The latter was an old ally and got him appointed as commander of the French 2nd Army, which encompassed all the French forces in North Africa. He would have to wait until April 1944 before he was officially informed that his force designated Army B would be committed to the invasion of southern France.

After the Allied invasion of French Northwest Africa, the French Army was in such a state that it was unable to take part in either the invasions of Sicily or Italy. While America was the armoury of the Free World, Eisenhower considered the French forces as just one of many exiled European armies competing for resources. In addition, many were not convinced of the fighting value of French troops.

General Giraud wanted to reorganise the French Army into 13 divisions, but shipping requirements meant that the Americans could only commit at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 to supply 11. The first convoy arrived in North Africa on 14 April and by July, 75,000 French troops had been equipped with American weapons, uniforms and vehicles. In the meantime, de Gaulle's two Free French divisions had been poaching recruits and were re-deployed to Libya out of the way.

Giraud though was obliged to factor de Gaulle's units into his plans, and this, plus a shortage of support personnel, required him to disband five divisions, therefore he ended up with just eight available (including three armoured) to

take part in the liberation of Europe. Two of these, the 1st Motorised and 2nd Armoured, were staunchly Gaullist units, while four others were composed almost entirely of colonial soldiers who were unaware of all the political manoeuvring.

Captain Harry C Butcher, USNR, Eisenhower's Naval Aide, was only too conscious of his boss's role in rearming the French Army and its value to the invasion of southern France, stating: 'Ike had had a considerable part in the effort of the US to equip the rebuilt French Army. He feels we have in it a very considerable investment, and the French troops, plus the Americans and British, must be used to obtain a final decision against Germany.'

At the French Re-armament ceremony in Algiers on 8 May 1943, Eisenhower said: 'Today, General Giraud, through you, as one of the consistent and implacable foes of Hitlerism, and the leader of the French forces in North Africa, I am happy to transfer these implements of war to Frenchmen inspired by that purpose.'

He then read out a cable from Roosevelt setting Allied sights firmly on the liberation of Paris and French democracy: 'French valour and French patriotism now have a trenchant sword with which to help strike from France the shackles of oppression. The victorious Jeanne d'Arc carried her battle standard into the coronation cathedral. Now that the only Axis soldiers left on African soil will soon be in graves or in prison camps, let us set our hearts and minds on complete victory, so that we may march, with this equipment, up the Champs



Elysee to the Arc de Triomphe, where lies the Unknown Soldier, symbol of French heroism. There we will render a salute to the Tricolour, once again floating proudly, peacefully and forever over a freed French people, who will re-establish their own government in accordance with their own conceptions of right, liberty and justice.'

### **Corsica operation**

The French I Corps was reconstituted on 16 August 1943 at Ain-Taya, Algeria under Lieutenant General Martin. Its key French combat units were re-equipped with American supplied uniforms and weapons as part of the rearmament of the French Army of Africa. It would not be long before the corps was bloodied liberating French territory.

By early September, the German 90th Panzergrenadier Division and the Reichsführer-SS assault infantry brigade were evacuating Sardinia and transiting via the French island of Corsica. In response, the French launched Operation Vésuve, landing elements of I Corps at Ajaccio, on the 13th, just three days after being informed that the Italian troops on the island were willing to fight for the Allies. Aiming to cut off the withdrawing German troops, I Corps linked up with Corsican partisans who also wanted their occupiers gone.

When German forces, under General von Senger und Etterlin, began disarming the Italians, General Magli ordered them to consider the Germans as enemies. From that point, Italian units on the island cooperated with the French forces. Although supported by the Royal Navy, the French were unable to land swiftly enough to prevent the bulk of the Germans from reaching their exit ports on the east coast.

During the Corsica operation, de Gaulle and other Allied leaders criticized Giraud for arming the communist dominated Front National resistance group. Giraud was also implicated in the Pecheu Affair; the latter was Vichy's Interior Minister whom Giraud had permitted to come to Algiers (he was charged with complicity in the German execution of French workers). Pecheu was shot and the FCNL decided in April 1944 that Giraud should stand down as C-in-C and he was put on the retired list; his enemies tried to assassinate him in Algeria on 28 August, but he survived.

De Gaulle had triumphed. He was in complete dominance of the FCNL by November 1943, which controlled most of France's colonial possessions and, more importantly, the troops being

equipped by Eisenhower. During the Italian Campaign of 1943-44, de Gaulle committed 100,000 men involved in the fighting against the German Winter and Gustav Lines. In the meantime, frantic re-equipping went on in French North Africa and, by the time of the Normandy invasion, his Free French forces totalled over 400,000 men under arms. With such an army, Paris would be within his grasp.

In the autumn of 1943, de Gaulle hinted to General Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque, commander of the Free French 2nd Armoured Division that the Allies might employ his formation for Overlord – the Allied invasion of Nazi occupied France. In the summer of 1943, Leclerc's force became known as the 2e Division Blindée and was fully equipped along the lines of an American armoured division, with Sherman medium and Honey light tanks, armoured cars, self-propelled guns and towed artillery.

De Gaulle clearly saw Leclerc's division as his spearhead back into mother France, but perhaps, just as importantly, the spearhead of his political ambitions. Leclerc was a staunch Gaullist and his men were veterans of the tough fighting in Libya and Tunisia. Both de Gaulle and Leclerc knew Paris was the goal. Weak government is what had brought France

down in 1940 and neither of them wanted the French Communist Party taking power in the French capital.

Understandably, Leclerc began to press for transport to Britain, causing a row with General de Lattre de Tassigny who wanted the 2nd Armoured Division as part of his Army B (1st Army), which was earmarked for the invasion of Southern France. The latter was also instrumental to de Gaulle's plans for the liberation. When Leclerc finally shipped to Britain in April 1944, as if to drive home the division's destination, all the tanks and vehicles had a map of France painted on them.

By early 1944, de Gaulle's revitalised French Army had committed an expeditionary corps of four divisions to Italy, consisting of the 1st Motorised, 2nd Moroccan and 3rd Algerian Infantry and the 4th Moroccan Mountain division under General Juin. The 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division had been formed on 1 May 1943 and committed to Italy at the end of November 1943. They were followed by the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division, also created on 1 May 1943, after the conversion of the Constantine temporary division—it was sent to Italy in December that year. The 4th Moroccan Mountain Division had come into being on 1 June 1943, after being raised from



**American-supplied Sherman tanks of Leclerc's powerful 2nd Armoured Division. They formed the spearhead of the revitalised French Army and played a key role in the liberation of Paris.**





De Gaulle ensured his forces took credit for the liberation of Marseilles, Paris and Toulon. To the French, he was their saviour, not Churchill or Roosevelt.

the 3rd Moroccan Motorised Division, but was not committed to Italy until February 1944. Lastly, the 1st Free French Division, formed on 1 February 1943, was converted to the 1st Motorised Infantry Division on 24 August 1943 and sent to Italy in April the following year.

### Head of French government

In the meantime, General de Lattre faced the headache of forging ardent Gaullists, colonial forces, former Vichy supporters, escapees and other disparate units into a single coherent command capable of combat operations. His efforts were further made difficult by the fact that the best units were either now with Juin, fighting in Italy, or earmarked for Normandy. De Lattre needed weapons and equipment not only for his assault force but also for eager recruits once they were back on French soil.

De Lattre had the backing of de Gaulle, as neither was happy at the idea of a French Army within the American command structure and reliant on American logistic support. Both felt Roosevelt and Eisenhower did not fully appreciate that a revitalised French Army would be charged with liberating its homeland. They in turn were insensitive to Roosevelt and Eisenhower's concerns

over the future of the French Empire and whether de Gaulle was the right man for the top job.

De Lattre though was not easily dissuaded and the Americans eventually agreed to supply five infantry and three armoured divisions. This was not considered so generous when it became apparent it included Juin's four divisions and Leclerc's armoured division. Under these circumstances, friction was inevitable. One can only feel sorry for Eisenhower, while admiring his stamina, as he was caught between the competing demands of Churchill and de Gaulle. It is a wonder that the alliance managed to survive these strains and is testament to Eisenhower's quite remarkable management skills. Any lesser statesman could have greatly exacerbated the situation.

De Lattre began to cast an envious eye on Juin's Corps, advocating that it should be brought back from Italy and placed under him. General de Gaulle and the Allied command sided with de Lattre; Juin's forces joined him in July 1944, giving him a total of seven divisions. De Lattre showed great tact in assimilating the four divisions who were devoted to Juin. He achieved this by keeping General M Carpentier, Juin's Chief of Staff, and all the existing divisional commanders.

In Algiers, the FCNL became the Provisional Government of the French Republic—cynics smiled at the word 'provisional.' De Gaulle now considered himself head of the French government, though neither Churchill nor Roosevelt recognised him as such. He returned to London, where he disassociated himself once more from the Allied cause by refusing to broadcast to his fellow countrymen on D-Day.

De Gaulle, having ensured his political and military ascendancy in Algiers, also laid the groundwork for his return to France. In February 1944, he created the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) under General Koenig to unite all the various resistance groups within mainland France. Ironically, in the run-up to Overlord and D-Day, Churchill and Roosevelt were loath to discuss their plans with Koenig, as information sent to Algiers would end up in Paris and because the resistance was heavily infiltrated by the Germans would inevitably reach Hitler. Nonetheless, it meant when the time came de Gaulle would be able to absorb the resistance into his military command structure. Leclerc would go on to liberate Paris for de Gaulle while de Lattre would secure Marseilles and Toulon at the head of his Gaullist Army. This ensured de Gaulle's political ascendancy in post-war France •





# *Marston Moor - who was to blame?*

One of the biggest battles ever fought on British soil, it pitched the dashing cavalier Prince Rupert against an 'unholy alliance' of Scots Covenanters and English Parliamentarians. It could have been an easy victory for the Royalist commander, but, argues JEFFREY JAMES, something went badly wrong...



**T**he battle of Marston Moor, fought on 2 July 1644, was the defining event of the English Civil War in the North—perhaps the largest battle ever fought on British soil. Until his dying day, Prince Rupert carried with him a letter from his uncle, Charles I, which he claimed ordered him to fight the battle—no matter what. His march across the Pennines from Lancashire, wrong-footing the besieging Anglo-Scots army and relieving York, ranks among his most brilliant exploits. Defeating the enemy would have confirmed his place among the great commanders of history. Instead, the resulting battle was an unmitigated disaster.

Rupert had difficulty coming to terms with his defeat and blamed others for failing him. He was angered by a perceived lack of support from the Marquess of Newcastle, the King's Captain-General in York, and from Lord Eythin, Newcastle's Major-General. He was also disappointed by the tactical incompetence shown by one of his own officers. But was he really badly served—or was the battle lost through nobody's fault but his own?

### **Battle hardened**

The Prince's army, 14,000 strong, crossed into Yorkshire and reached the stronghold of Skipton Castle on 26 June 1644. He halted there, just 40 miles from the besieged city of York, to re-provision and rest his men. He had left a full infantry regiment behind in Lancashire to secure his communications and to garrison the important port of Liverpool—a major prize wrested from the Parliamentarians earlier in the month. His foray into Lancashire had been carried out to gain recruits for his army, along with essential supplies of gunpowder and weapons. His men were a mix of veterans and new recruits, the best being his own cavalry and infantry regiments and approximately 4000 battle hardened cavalry detached from Newcastle's army. The rest of the Marquess's army lay 'bottled up' in York.

The halt at Skipton allowed Rupert's newly raised Lancashire troops to familiarise themselves with their weapons and master the fundamentals of drill and discipline. The enemy commanders, whose armies encircled the city, were aware of the Prince's approach, but overestimated his strength—perhaps because of the awe in which he was held at that time. They abandoned their siege lines and prepared to do battle, drawing up their forces, almost twice the size of

Rupert's, on Marston Moor, west of the city. On 30 June, the Prince faced them on the Knaresborough road with a large cavalry force, luring them into believing they faced the vanguard of his army. Behind this dense cavalry screen, he then force-marched the main body of his army in a wide loop around them, triumphantly arriving outside the north gate of York on 1 July.

In a letter sent that evening, the Marquess's praise for the deliverance of the city was both fulsome and poetic, and probably not to Rupert's taste. The Prince was not one to be flattered or courted. Assuming from the letter's tone that Newcastle would simply fall in line with his plans, Rupert sent orders for the Northern army to be marshalled outside the city walls at dawn the next morning. His aim was to combine forces and bring the enemy to battle as soon as possible. Despite needing the Marquess's immediate and unquestioning cooperation, there is no evidence he met face to face with him on the eve of battle, as is often supposed. This failure would lead to bitter disappointment and recriminations.

Although having no previous military experience, William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, had until now enjoyed complete authority over the war in the North. He was by nature a poet and musician. He was more used to mixing in philosophical and scientific circles than the military, which may explain his otherwise puzzling appointment of a fellow poet, William Davenant, to the

important post of Lieutenant-General of Ordnance in his army. With all his broad accomplishments and idiosyncrasies, he remained a proud and touchy aristocrat, and it is likely Rupert's casual assumption of command rankled with him.

Newcastle's Scottish Major-General, James King, Lord Eythin, had come across Rupert before on the Continent and considered him to be impulsive. His advice to Newcastle was not to risk his men in a major set piece battle, especially if outnumbered. Rumours of tensions in the enemy camp were circulating. Perhaps the unholy alliance between the Parliamentarian and Scottish Covenanters forces was crumbling? Eythin expected Royalist reinforcements from the North—perhaps as many as 3000 cavalry. It made no sense to the cautious Scotsman to confront the allies at a disadvantage in the meantime.

To make matters worse, the York garrison had not been paid for some considerable time, having endured over two months of siege. As a result, a blind eye had been turned to the plundering of the deserted rebel trenches outside the city. Many of the soldiers were hopelessly drunk. There was no realistic chance of a muster at dawn. No wonder Newcastle and Eythin were aghast at Rupert's demand that their troops be immediately committed to battle. The surprise is that they did not tell him so immediately. Thus, on the eve of battle, Rupert was unaware the planned juncture of the two Royalist armies would be delayed, and that the commanders at York opposed his plans to fight.



**Prince Rupert—his reputation damaged by his performance at Marston Moor, still retained the King's sufficient faith to become overall commander of the Royalist armies.**





**Battlefield of Marston Moor, looking south-west toward the rebel left flank, from a position close to the ditch and the Royalist front line. [Jeffrey James]**

### **Dropping bombshell**

Given the unwillingness felt by Newcastle and his staff to commit their army, why was Rupert so keen to fight the next day? Was it merely arrogance or impulsiveness, as is often claimed, or were there important strategic issues at stake?

Charles had written to his nephew on 15 June 1644, while the Prince was in Lancashire, with alarming news from the South. The King, fearful of imminent defeat and capture, had been forced to quit Oxford on 3 June in a dramatic night march to avoid being trapped by two converging rebel armies. Some of his advisors were urging Rupert's immediate recall. However, despite the seriousness of his situation, the King's letter reconfirmed Rupert's primary objective of relieving York.

The relevant section read: 'If York be lost, I shall esteem my crown little less, unless supported by your sudden march to me & a miraculous conquest in the South, before the effects of the Northern power can be found here. But if York be relieved, & you beat the rebel armies of both Kingdoms, which are before it, then but otherwise not, I may make a shift (upon the defensive) to spin out time, until you come to assist me; wherefore I command and conjure you...that (all new enterprises aside) you immediately march (according to your first intention) with all your force to the relief of York'.

Having succeeded in relieving the city, Rupert was all too aware of the potential need to ride at a moment's notice to his uncle's assistance. It was this pressing consideration, reinforced by the King's letter, which hardened his resolve to bring the rebels to battle at

the earliest opportunity. Although his uncle's letter was not a direct order to fight, Rupert treated it as such. Only by decisively defeating the enemy could he march south unchallenged. To march to the King's assistance or regain his base in Lancashire would mean fighting a battle later at a disadvantage. Rupert knew from his spies that the allied army expected to be reinforced. A battle at some point appeared inevitable. It might as well be now.

Had Rupert and Newcastle's forces been deployed and ready to fight first thing on the morning of 2 July, there is every chance they would have defeated the enemy army. The rebel commanders had chosen to withdraw, to link up with expected reinforcements. Their units were strung out, retiring along the Tadcaster road, vulnerable to attack. However, at daybreak, to Rupert's dismay, there was no sign of Newcastle's infantry. Only the Prince's own army and the Northern cavalry were on hand. The disappointment he felt at having his plans thwarted dampened his natural energy and confidence. He hesitated to bring on a general action, fearing that without Newcastle's forces he would be blamed should events go against him. Possibly he wasted a good opportunity. A prompt attack on the allied rearguard might have propelled the enemy into a disorderly retreat. Instead, he spent his time impatiently scanning the skyline for the arrival of the York army.

It was around 9.00am before Newcastle and his entourage arrived on the moor. Ominously there was no sign of the Marquess's veteran soldiery. Rupert

ruefully stated he wished the Marquess had arrived sooner, but hoped they might yet have a glorious day. When asked about the whereabouts of his infantry regiments, Newcastle recounted the difficulties he faced mustering them, before dropping the bombshell that he opposed committing them to battle, for all the reasons thrashed out with his staff the evening before.

As a 'Prince of the Blood', Rupert outranked the Marquess. He could simply order him to fight – whatever his objections. Although frustrated by the turn of events, Rupert remained stubbornly intent on bringing the enemy to battle as soon as possible. Rather than issue a direct command, however, realising at last the need to deal sensitively with this prickly nobleman, he declared he had been absolutely ordered by the King to fight the Scots 'whereso'er he met them'. He had a letter that stated as much. Etiquette prevented Newcastle from demanding to see the letter and Rupert did not produce it. The Marquess, now boxed into a corner, gallantly stated 'he would not shun a fight, for he had no other ambition [than] to live and die a loyal subject to his Majesty'. With the decision to confront the allies finally settled, messengers hurried back to York to inform Lord Eythin, ordering him to march out with the infantry without delay.

### **Fierce fight**

The enemy rearguard was posted between the villages of Long Marston and Tockwith, to the west of York, overlooking a stretch of moorland across which Rupert's forces were advancing.





**Marston Moor monument, beside the Long Marston to Tockwith road, bisecting the battlefield.**  
[Jeffrey James]

Rupert's cavalry vanguard, supported by a regiment of infantry, attempted to gain the advantage of some high ground beside Tockwith by driving off the enemy cavalry. A rebel eyewitness recounts how the Royalists attacked after 'perceiving that our cavalry had possessed themselves of a corn hill, and having discovered neer unto that hill a place of great advantage, where they might have both sun and winde of us'.

A fierce fight developed in the fields south of Tockwith, but the rebel cavalry, supported by some Scottish dragoons, drove the Royalist cavalry back onto their main body. The Royalist supporting infantry also fell back, before rallying behind a ditch within musket shot of the enemy. This position beside the ditch would later be reinforced by Rupert's own crack 'bluecoat' regiment of foot and a battery of guns – forming an advance guard covering the deployment of his army.

The ditch line defended by the advance guard was just a small section of a more pronounced discontinuity marking the edge of the moorland separating the rival forces. Rupert gained possession of this feature right along its length and detached musketeers from various regiments to defend it. The allies held the higher arable ground to the south. Thus the geography of the battlefield placed Rupert's army, against his inclinations, in an essentially defensive posture, allowing the enemy the opportunity to dictate the course of the battle.

The hours passed. The weather was humid. Later there would be thunder. The earlier skirmish had persuaded the allies that Rupert meant to fight. Their

army was urgently recalled. As the day wore on, their army was remorselessly deployed, regiment by regiment, brigade by brigade, squadron by squadron – all within cannon shot of the Royalists.

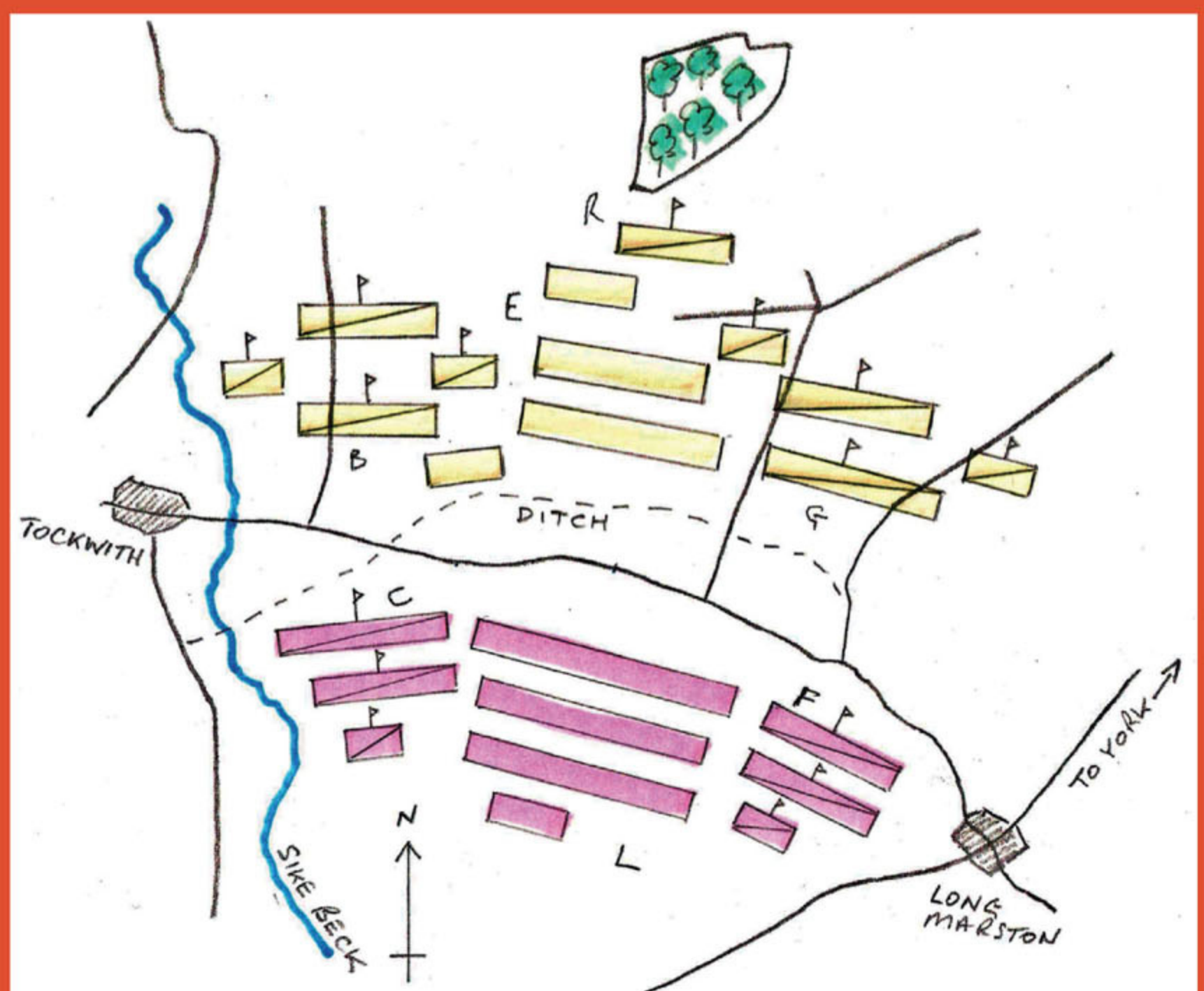
Approximately two miles apart, the villages of Tockwith and Long Marston delineated the western and eastern flanks of the battlefield, but were not occupied by either side. Rupert's right wing of cavalry, commanded by Sir John Byron, deployed in two lines, with its outermost squadrons extended westwards, 'refused'

to counter any attack against its exposed flank. The Royalist centre comprised Rupert's infantry, drawn up under the command of Sir Henry Tillier, a veteran of the Irish Wars.

The bulk of the Northern cavalry, which had joined up with Rupert in Lancashire, and had accompanied him on his relief march, were deployed on the left. They were led by Lord George Goring, Newcastle's talented but dissolute Lieutenant General of Horse. Two further brigades, led by Sir William Blakiston and Sir Edward Widdrington, were detached to bolster the infantry in the centre and to provide a small reserve. Interlining the squadrons of cavalry on both flanks were musketeers, stationed defensively to pour fire into an advancing enemy.

By early afternoon, the discrepancy in the size of the two opposing armies became marked. The allies numbered well in excess of 20,000, while, without Newcastle's veteran infantry, Rupert's army barely amounted to 15,000. The opportunity for him to fight at an advantage had passed.

At around 4.00pm, Newcastle's infantry regiments belatedly came into view, with Lord Eythin at their head. Since the order to march out of the city cannot have reached him until well after 9.00am, the time of Newcastle's conference with Rupert, it is hardly surprising it took the best part of the day for the troops to arrive on the battlefield. Nevertheless, it is



**Sketch map of Marston Moor showing the deployment of the armies prior to the battle:**  
B = Byron, C = Cromwell, E = Eythin, F = Fairfax, G = Goring, L = Leven, R = Rupert.





**Sir Thomas Fairfax, known by the nickname 'Black Tom', was to become, along with Cromwell, the outstanding military commander of the English Civil Wars – but at Marston Moor, his cavalry were routed by the Royalists.**



**Sir John Byron was one of the King's most loyal supporters, among the first to rally to him when war broke out in 1642. He was unfairly made a scapegoat for failures at Marston Moor.**

likely Rupert expressed anger at Eythin's lateness and we can imagine the strained formality of their meeting. Rupert briefed the Scotsman on the overall situation, using a plan to highlight the army's deployment. Eythin was critical. He considered it to be drawn up too close to the enemy. Rupert offered to withdraw further back, but Eythin stated that it was too late in the day. He also declared the plan looked very well on paper but that there was nothing like it in the field—a puzzling statement, possibly referring to the fact the plan could not be fulfilled, since, to Rupert's dismay, the stubborn Scot had left behind several infantry regiments to garrison York. He had brought with him less than 3000 infantry—far short of the number expected.

The late arrival of Newcastle's infantry had the effect of placing them in reserve, rather than in the front line as planned. Despite this, Rupert declared his intention of retaking the initiative and charging the enemy at once. Again Eythin objected, declaring the Prince should be wary of repeating his impetuosity of six years before, when, during the Thirty Years War, he had lost the day at Lemgo, falling prisoner to the Imperialists. A tense stand-off between the two men ensued. Eythin's lateness and reluctance to fight had scuppered Rupert's plans. After the battle, the Prince would impute treacherous intent

to the Scotsman's actions.

As evening fell, Newcastle's infantry regiments were shoe-horned into the available space at the rear of the Royalist army, leaving Rupert's own infantry, including a worryingly high proportion of newly raised and partially trained levies, in the front lines to face the full fury of battle should the allies attack. The sound of psalms being sung from parched Puritan throats drifted across the cornfields on the heavy evening air. Perhaps the singing strained the nerves of the Cavaliers.

Newcastle, having listened to Eythin's gloomy pronouncements on the army's dispositions, uneasily enquired about the likelihood of battle suddenly being brought on by the enemy before nightfall. Rupert dismissed the possibility, stating it was too late in the day. The Prince was now resigned to fighting on the morrow. Perhaps frustration clouded his judgement. He reassured the Marquess there was no likelihood of any action. The Royalists may even have been ordered to stand down. Rupert rode away to the rear to get his supper. Newcastle made his way back to his coach to smoke a pipe. Hardly had he drawn his first puff of tobacco before the ominous sound of cannon fire and musketry filled the air.

### **Sudden attack**

Parliament's Scoutmaster-General Watson, later wrote that 'surely had two such armies, drawn up so close one to the other, being of both wings within musket shot, departed without fighting, I think it would have been as great a wonder as hath been seen in England'. It would appear that Watson was in little doubt that one side or other would precipitate a battle. This strikingly contrasts with Rupert's own appreciation of the situation, casting doubt on his judgement. Eythin had also thought it too late in the day for action to be joined – though he did express concern at the closeness of the two armies. Newcastle, a grandee with little military experience, alone among the Royalists appears to have appreciated the danger of a sudden attack. This failure of preparedness would cost them dear.

The allied army of Covenanters and Parliamentarians at Marston Moor was commanded by the Scottish General Alexander Leslie, Lord Leven—an experienced and respected leader. Like his opposing countryman, Lord Eythin, he was known to be notoriously cautious. He was a man unlikely to initiate a battle unless convinced the odds were stacked in his favour. The Scots made up half of the total allied strength. The other half comprised two separate English





**Marquess of Newcastle, Captain General of the King's forces in the North—a proud and touchy aristocrat, he was offended by Rupert's casual assumption of command on the eve of battle.**

contingents, the army of the Eastern Association counties led by the Earl of Manchester, and Lord Ferdinando Fairfax's small Yorkshire army.

Oliver Cromwell and Sir Thomas Fairfax, both talented cavalry commanders, each with a number of victorious encounters with the Cavaliers to their credit, commanded the cavalry on the left and right wings of the allied army respectively. Both wings were seconded by Scottish cavalry, many armed with the lance—still a favoured weapon north of the border. The allies embattled along traditional lines, with infantry in the centre and cavalry on the wings.

Watson places the time of the allied attack at 7.30pm, stating that 'we seeing the enemy would not charge us, we resolved by the help of God to charge them'. The allied General's official dispatch reports that 'before both armies were in readiness it was near seven o' clock at night, about which time they advanced the one toward the other'. The important distinction here is not the slight disparity in the times, but that the official dispatch indicates the two armies, or at least elements of the two armies, attacked simultaneously. This, as we shall see, serves to add credence to a later claim made by Rupert against Sir John Byron, commanding the Royalist right wing, that,

against orders, he advanced to counter Cromwell's charge – masking the fire of his supporting musketeers and guns.

Another account states the allies advanced to take advantage of confusion caused in the Royalist camp by the late arrival of Newcastle's infantry. If this account is true, then the newly arrived infantry were still in the process of forming up at the time of the attack. Having superior numbers and perceiving the Royalists to be unprepared was enough to dispel Leven's natural caution. His attack took them completely by surprise and Rupert must take the blame for this.

As overall commander, it was his responsibility to ensure proper vigilance was maintained at all times. He was in the wrong place when the enemy attacked. In the mayhem that followed, he was unable to take effective control of events. Many of his foot soldiers and cavalymen, having downed their arms and broken ranks, were forced to hurry back in disarray to their posts. To add to the confusion, a cloudburst occurred, rendering many of the defender's matchlock muskets useless. The religious zealots in the rebel ranks were no doubt encouraged by this sure sign of God's partiality.

### **Cromwell's Ironsides**

On the allied left wing, Oliver Cromwell's

cavalry, including his famous double regiment—the Ironsides—charged 'with admirable valour'. They broke through Byron's first line but were then held in check by his second. Cromwell was wounded and for a time lost to the battle. His troopers had a hard time of it, being charged both in front and flank. After an hour or so, however, numbers started to tell against the Royalists. Cromwell states both sides 'stood at the swords point a pretty while, hacking one another; but at last (it so pleased God) he brake through them, scattering them before him like a little dust'. Rupert, rushing forward at the head of his lifeguard, shouted, 'Swounds, do you run? Follow me.' But was immediately swept away in the panic that ensued.

Byron subsequently became the scapegoat for the collapse. Prince Rupert's diary, compiled after the restoration, says that much harm was done by 'ye improper charge of ye Lord Byron', laying the blame for the rout fairly and squarely on his shoulders. The official allied dispatch, which states both sides came together at the same time, probably refers to Byron's counter charge. By counter charging, rather than waiting to be charged at a halt, he was following the generally accepted practice employed in cavalry encounters. Unfortunately his action blocked the defensive fire of the musketeers interlining his squadrons, and may have masked the fire of the battery of guns supporting the advanced guard beside the ditch.

Byron was handicapped by being seriously outnumbered and facing Cromwell's 'Ironsides', ably supported by David Leslie's Scots lancers—the best troops the enemy could throw at him. The odds were stacked against him. Prior to Marston Moor, he had suffered a major defeat at Nantwich. A further defeat would follow at Montgomery Castle. In the circumstances, he was an easy target for Rupert's apologists.

Scoutmaster-General Watson tells us the allied front line of infantry began the charge in the centre, and 'in a moment were passed the ditch into the Moore, upon equal grounds with the enemy, our men going in a running march—dispersing the enemies foot almost as fast as they charged them.' A statement clearly indicating the Royalist infantry was unformed at the time of the attack and was taken by surprise. Once Rupert's advance guard beside the ditch was driven back and his front line of infantry beaten, the raw levies in the second line simply surrendered or fled. Rupert's Major



General, Sir Henry Tillier, was among the wounded and captured. The triumphant enemy infantry were only halted by a furious counter attack launched by Sir William Blakiston's cavalry, seconded by Eythin's newly arrived infantry regiments.

On the Royalist left wing, Goring's cavalry fared better. Unlike Byron, Goring was not outnumbered. Despite a taste for carousing and strong drink, he was also a gifted cavalry commander. The advancing enemy cavalry, led by Sir Thomas Fairfax, became disordered by furze bushes and the steepness of the descent onto the moor. At this part of the battlefield, the infamous ditch posed a very serious obstacle. Unlike Byron, Goring waited before counter charging, allowing his musketeers to pour a destructive fire into the advancing enemy. Few who charged with Fairfax that day came away from the battle unscathed. Many were killed, including his brother Charles. More allied soldiers were killed and injured on this wing than at any other point on the battlefield.

Fairfax recounts how the triumphant Royalists 'stood up and down the Field in several bodies of Horse'. He was wounded and unhorsed and came very close to being captured, but by discarding his field sign, a white handkerchief, he managed to pass through the ranks of the enemy, being taken for one of their own commanders. Amazingly, he succeeded in joining up with Cromwell's victorious cavalry on the other wing.

Not only had Fairfax's cavalry been broken, a considerable quantity of Scottish infantry joined them in flight, many trampled by their own routing cavalry. Arthur Trevor, an eyewitness, speaks of meeting a shoal of Scots in flight, crying 'Wey us, we are all undone'. However, at least one stubborn Scottish infantry regiment held out, valiantly fighting off repeated attacks from Sir Charles Lucas's cavalry brigade, part of Goring's front line. Lucas was himself captured, bravely leading a charge into the bristling ranks of Scottish pike.

With the collapse of the allied right wing, two of the three rebel generals, Lord Leven and Lord Fairfax fled the battlefield, convinced the day was lost. Only the plucky Earl of Manchester remained, busy rallying runaways and leading them back into the fight.

For the Royalists, Prince Rupert was swept away by his broken right wing. Tradition has it he was forced to lay low in a bean field to avoid capture. Though a compelling image, the story was almost certainly made up by hostile propagandists to add to his humiliation. His beloved



**Fall of York on 16 July 1644. This Victorian picture shows the Royalists riding out, enjoying all the honours of war, with colours flying, and drums beating, having finally surrendered the city.**

dog, Boy, until then a lucky mascot for the Cavaliers, was killed, probably crushed in the rout. Lord Eythin, though perhaps guilty of dragging his feet earlier in the day, went some way to making amends by launching the counter attack in the centre, which for a time turned the tide of battle. Newcastle was also in the thick of the fighting, charging and routing a Scots regiment at the head of his gentlemen volunteers. If his wife's account of the battle can be believed, he was also responsible for single-handedly killing three of the enemy with his page's 'half leaden sword'.

### **Bloody sacrifice**

In the gathering darkness, the final agonies of battle were played out. Goring desperately attempted to rally his victorious, but hopelessly disordered troopers. They were faced by Cromwell and Leslie's cavalry, which, having swept around the Royalist rear, challenged the Cavaliers across the bloody ditch. The positions of the two sides were reversed.

Goring's cavalry occupied Fairfax's former ground, while the rebels occupied theirs. No account of the subsequent fight exists, but Goring's men, by then a spent force, came off worst, leaving the allied cavalry free to fall on the few remaining beleaguered Royalist infantry regiments.

An eyewitness recounts how a group of Royalist officers, belatedly attempting to rally their defeated cavalry, were approached by Rupert's Major General, Sir John Urry, who in no uncertain terms told them they were wasting their time, declaring that 'broken horse will not fight'. He then rode back to York to get further instructions from the Prince. Towards midnight, he returned to order those still at large on the battlefield to retire to York, where Rupert was attempting to rebuild some semblance of an army. It appears Urry, a professional soldier, coolly kept his head throughout as the tragedy unfolded. He was very much a pragmatist, later changing sides to accept a commission in the Scottish army.

Elsewhere on the battlefield,





**Oliver Cromwell at the head of his cavalry, known for their rigid discipline as 'the Ironsides'. Cromwell was wounded during the battle at Marston Moor and was forced from the fight to receive treatment before returning to lead his troops to victory.**

Newcastle's own 'white-coated' infantry regiment, nicknamed 'Newcastle's Lambs', were ordered to form a rearguard in a desperate bid to extricate the remains of the army to York. The stubborn northerners formed an almost impenetrable hedgehog of pikes and fought off repeated cavalry attacks before eventually being destroyed by close range musketry. All but 30 men from the regiment perished. Their epic last stand has ever since been portrayed as in some way atoning for their late arrival onto the battlefield. If so, it was a particularly bloody sacrifice. Sir Thomas Fairfax, horrified by the needless slaughter, is said to have called out 'Spare the poor deluded countrymen' – but to no avail.

At dawn the next day, 3 July, Rupert rallied what forces he still had to hand. They totalled around 3000 cavalry, along with some of the surviving infantry. He requested that the fresh infantry regiments left behind by Eythin to garrison York should join him. He planned to fall on the victorious allies

without delay while they were still dispersed and vulnerable. The plan was half baked, a product of desperation. Eythin is said to have dissuaded him, arguing the city could not afford to have its garrison further depleted. There was another confrontation but it appears Rupert stopped short of accusing the Scot of outright treachery.

Like others, Eythin now considered the Royalist cause to be lost in the North. He is sometimes blamed for Newcastle's decision to abandon the struggle altogether. However, the Marquess needed little persuasion. His veteran infantry had been destroyed. He was shamed by the collapse of his army and feared the mockery of the court. Next day, he set off with Eythin and others to voluntary exile in Holland.

Rupert later made it clear he held the Scotsman largely accountable for the defeat. Rumours circulated that Eythin had acted traitorously, that he was perhaps in the pay of his Scottish countrymen.

Over a year later, in January 1645,

Eythin wrote to Rupert from Hamburg, complaining of suffering a 'multitude of griefs' when informed of being accused of 'som traitorous act Yr Highnes had to leay to my cheardge'. What prompted the belated letter is not known. Did the Scotsman feel culpable in some way for the defeat? More likely he wanted to clear his name from the slanderous rumours. In any event, Rupert's veiled allegations failed to stick. The crusty old Scot retained favour with the Stuarts and was later commissioned Lieutenant General, to serve under the renowned James Graham, Marquess of Montrose.

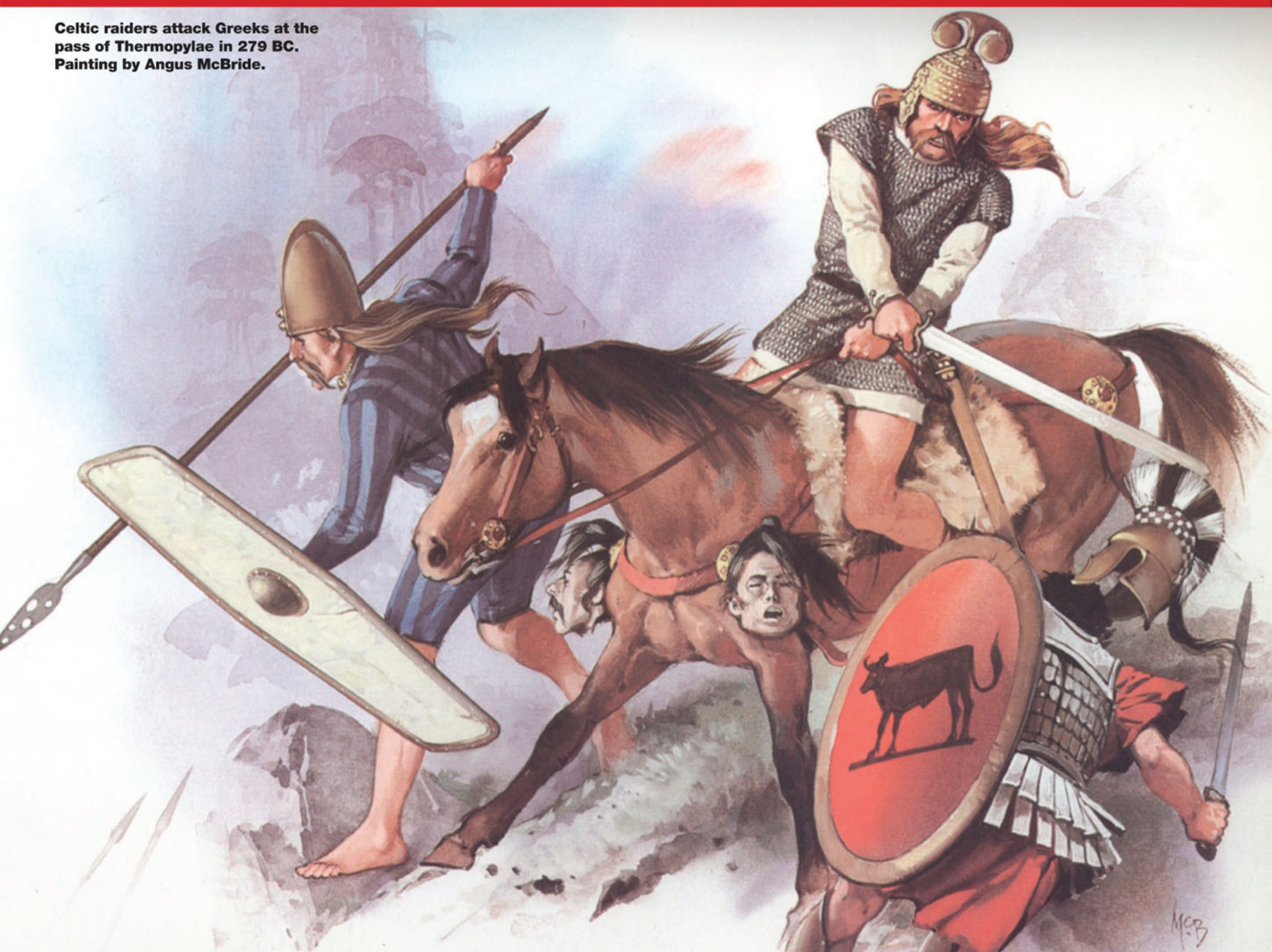
Along with the remaining cavalry, Rupert extricated just a few hundred infantry from the wreckage of his army. It is reckoned he lost over 3000 killed at Marston Moor, with another 1500 taken prisoner. He marched away from York on 4 July. The city fell to the rebels on 16th. With the exception of a few isolated strongholds, the north of England was lost to the Royalist cause. Cromwell credited the victory to 'God's blessing', stating that the Lord had made the enemy 'as stubble to our swords'. The allied battle cry had been 'God with us'. Their discipline and Godliness, as well as their numbers, had given them an edge over the Royalists.

The King's letter of 15 June is often blamed for encouraging Rupert to fight the battle of Marston Moor—a view reinforced by the Prince during his meeting with Newcastle on the morning of the battle. Charles rightly considered his nephew best placed to decide whether to fight or not, and to his credit he stood by Rupert's decision, laying no blame at his door for the defeat. He was being generous. Rupert was at fault for his peremptory summons to the commanders at York, expecting them to fall passively in line with his plans. He was also guilty of underestimating the allied will to fight, neglecting to take adequate precautions against a surprise attack. Sir John Byron's alleged 'improper charge', served only to hasten the inevitable.

Though Newcastle acted honourably, he should have told Rupert earlier of his misgivings about fighting and of problems marshalling his unruly infantry. The same criticism applies to Eythin, but, despite the bad blood between him and the Prince, the charge of treachery is specious. At worst Eythin was guilty of obstruction and excessive caution. With the benefit of hindsight, it is hard not to conclude that the wily Scotsman's strategy of playing a waiting game, avoiding the fall of dice with Cromwell's God of Battles, might well have been for the best •



Celtic raiders attack Greeks at the pass of Thermopylae in 279 BC. Painting by Angus McBride.



# Triumph of the Celts

For centuries, Celtic warriors ruled Europe.  
RICHARD BULL uncovers the secrets of their success.



**W**hen Alexander the Great asked an envoy of Celtic warriors what they feared most, he expected them to say 'You, my lord.' Instead they replied: 'We fear only that the sky fall and crush us, or the earth open and swallow us, or the sea rise and overwhelm us.' A peace was made, but Alexander was furious. How dare a tribe of insignificant barbarians fear the fantastic more than his realistic military might. Fifty years later, this same confident people devastated Alexander's homeland of Macedonia.

### Army of raiders

The raiding campaign of 279 BC was an ambitious one for the Celts. Living north of the Danube, they had pillaged Thrace and Macedonia before. But this time they had killed the King of Macedonia, heir to the glory of Alexander and Philip. A fever of adventure gripped the army of raiders. This expedition would be different. Brennus, their chieftain, described the rich townships of Greece. He told his followers of the sacred sanctuaries crammed with gold and silver offerings to the Greek gods. He knew it was a good time to embark on such a campaign. The Macedonian Empire had broken up: the Greeks were a divided people. The Celts mounted their horses and rode south.

Tales of Celtic atrocities in Thessaly gradually convinced many Greeks to forget their wrangling and combine their forces. They chose to confront the Celtic warriors at Thermopylae. Almost exactly two hundred years earlier, a Greek army had fought a bitter last stand at this mountain pass against Persian invaders. The tragic outcome of that gallant defence of their homeland cannot have escaped those Greeks now guarding the narrow mountain roads. In order to prevent the Celts even reaching Thermopylae, Callippus, the Athenian commander of the Greek force, sent a detachment of horsemen to the river Spercheius. There they broke down all the bridges across the fast-running waters.

Unhindered by any major resistance, Brennus had led his warriors along the coast. Having come so far, the Celts would not be denied their booty. That same night as the Greeks camped on the bankside, a group of Celtic raiders crossed the Spercheius lower down, in slower waters. Swimming in the dark, they used their long shields as rafts. Next morning, the Greeks dashed back to Thermopylae while Brennus forced the local population to rebuild the bridges.

Needing food and supplies and in no rush to confront the Greek army, the Celts were content to plunder the countryside around Heracleia. They did not even bother to attack the town. But the Greek army mustering at Thermopylae could not be avoided indefinitely. Celtic scouts and Greek deserters warned Brennus that it increased day by day.

On the day of conflict, it was the Greeks who began the battle. At sunrise they advanced quietly and in good order. Because of the rough terrain and the many streams that hurtled down the mountainside, horsemen proved useless and the majority of fighting was on foot. Despite being unarmoured except for their shields, the Celts fought with impressive ferocity. Some drew out from their wounds the spears by which they had been hit and threw them back at the Greeks. As the battle for the pass raged, the Athenian contingent rowed their triremes along the coast of Thermopylae: a coastline slowly silting up and becoming a salt-marsh. They attacked the flank of the Celts with arrows and slingshot. The Celts were hard pressed and many fell into the swamp, sinking beneath the mud. The first day of battle ended with many losses.

After a week's rest, Brennus decided to split his enemy's ranks. He sent horsemen off to the neighbouring region of Aetolia. Their plundering soon reached the ears of the Aetolian warriors camped at Thermopylae. Desperately worried by this assault on their homeland, they immediately left their Greek allies and pursued the Celtic raiders. Brennus now capitalised on the resentment of local Greeks. Fed up with the freebooters on their soil, local herdsmen were happy to see the Celts clear off along the many remote mountain paths. Acting as guides, they led Brennus and his warriors along the same tracks that had allowed the Persians to outflank the Greeks.

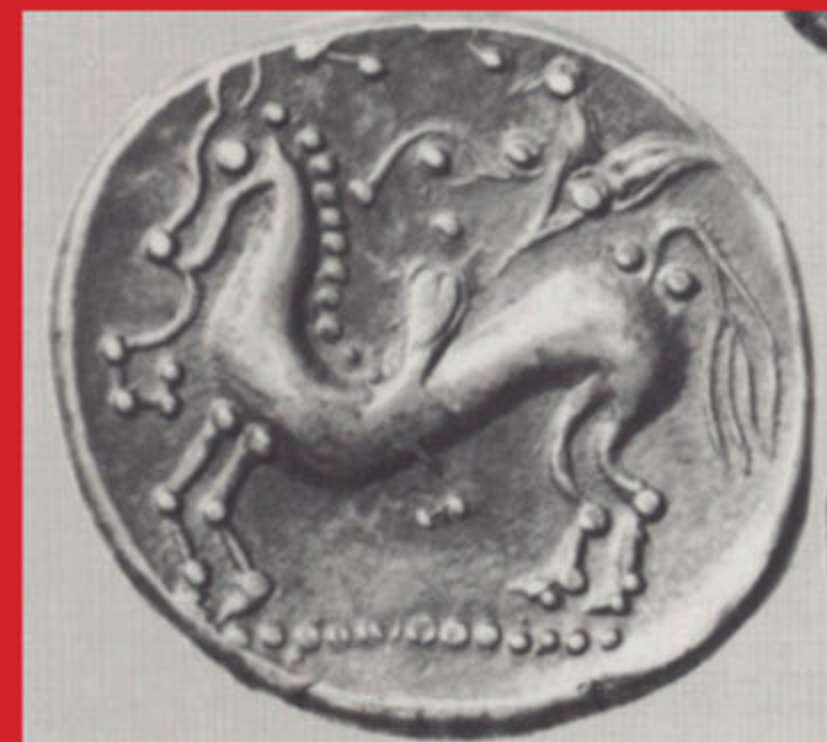
Obscured by a morning mist, Celtic warriors suddenly descended on the Greek guards of the mountain pass. Fighting a fierce rear-guard, the majority of the Greeks managed to clamber into Athenian ships and were evacuated from certain disaster. Thermopylae, however, belonged to the Celts and they now pressed on southwards through the mountains. The Celts had been promised the treasures of the Greek temples. But, as they approached the sacred territory of Delphi, it seemed that the very gods of the Greeks had finally rallied to protect their own people. Earthquakes shuddered beneath the raiders. Great rocks tumbled

down from Mount Parnassus and bottomless crags ripped open. Thunder crashed all around. Lightning bolts engulfed individual warriors in heavenly fire. Amidst the chaos, the weird shapes of the ghosts of past Greek heroes arose.

As Delphi came within view, the supernatural forces were joined by the very real strength of a Greek army. To this were added the guerrilla assaults of the local Phocians, haunting the snow-covered slopes of Mount Parnassus and pouring arrows and javelins into the Celtic ranks. In the face of all this, the Celtic warriors fought remarkably well. But that night, battered and exhausted, a panic spread through their camp. In the dark, thinking they were being attacked by the Greeks, Celt killed Celt. The next day, Greek reinforcements chased the Celts back to Heracleia. During the long retreat, Brennus, already wounded, took his own life. Harried throughout Thessaly, few of the Celtic raiders returned home.



**Detail of sacrificial scene on the Gundestrup cauldron, depicts Celtic warriors and horsemen.**



**Celtic coin showing horse, symbol of their mastery of horsemanship and their power over rival cultures.**



This then is the legend of the Celtic raid on Greece in 279 BC as recorded by Pausanias, a Greek historian of the second century ad. Analysing his account, one is immediately aware of several discrepancies and clichés. The Celtic raid on Delphi did not fall short of the city and end in a dismal rout. The Roman historian Livy writes several times of the pillage of Delphi while Strabo even suggests that treasure found in the sacred Celtic lake at Toulouse originated from Delphi. Moreover, after satisfying themselves in Greece, the Celts advanced back along the coast to the wealthy port of Byzantium where they crossed into Asia Minor. There they fought as mercenaries for the King of Bithynia. They then advanced further into Turkey and established themselves in territory belonging to the Phrygians, around present-day Ankara. The lands became known as Galatia and the descendants of those Celtic warriors continued to terrorise Asia Minor for over a hundred years, extracting tributes from rulers as far away as Syria.

### Renowned ferocity

Pausanias is guilty also of cultural cliché. His vision of the Celts is one of badly armed, near-naked savages. Of course, he admits, they fight courageously but it is the ferocity of animals. When confronted by the cool discipline of Greek warriors, these yelping, charging wildmen have to resort to the sneaky subterfuge of the barbarian Persians: a stratagem facilitated by Greek traitors. However, even Pausanias has to admit that Brennus—for a barbarian—handled the crossing of the river Spercheius with efficiency and success. But, like all Imperialist correspondents, Pausanias greatly exaggerates the numbers of the raging savages: 200,000 Celts against 25,000 Greeks.

In reality, the Celtic force that invaded Greece was probably little stronger than those raiding parties that frequently crossed the Danube. Along the way it may have been joined by Greek bandits, but it cannot have been more than a few thousand. It would also have been divided up into numerous plundering gangs, scattered across the countryside, not at all suited to a pitched battle. Such warriors were professional raiders and augmented their own arms with a variety of stolen armour and weapons. They were better equipped and of a higher morale than the hastily assembled Greek forces that confronted them. The oldest specimen of interlinked mail yet found has been



**Celtic chief Brennus receives tribute from the Romans in 390 BC. According to legend, Brennus threw his sword on the scales used to weigh the tribute gold and said: 'Woe to the conquered.'**

excavated from a third-century BC Celtic grave in Romania and this was probably developed from protective garments made up of rings threaded onto cords, like netting; a fragment of which has been found in an eighth-century Halstatt grave in Bohemia.

The renowned ferocity of the Celts was not all Greek myth. Livy puts a vivid description of the Galatians into the speech of Gnaeus Manlius Volso, a consul sent to crush the Asian Celts in 189 BC. 'They sing as they advance into battle,' the consul warns his troops, 'they yell and leap in the air, clashing their weapons against their shields. The Greeks and Phrygians are scared by this display, but the Romans are used to such wildness. We have learned that if you can bear up to their first onslaught—that initial charge of blind passion—then their limbs will grow weary with the effort and when their passion subsides, they are overcome by sun, dust, and thirst. And anyway, these Celts we face are of a mixed blood, part Greek. Not the Gauls our forefathers fought.'

Despite references to the 'degeneracy' of the Galatians, such a description of the Galatians differs little from other accounts of Celtic and Germanic warriors in Europe. Here again, the ferocity of the Celts is respected, but it is undermined by a lack of discipline and staying power that the Romans can turn to their advantage.

Such a vision of the Celts as ferocious barbarians has endured over the centuries. In the culture war of projected images, the Celts have come off second best to Graeco-Roman propaganda. This is largely because the Celtic peoples of central Europe maintained a culture without writing. The only written accounts we have of them in the thousand years until the fifth century AD are Greek and Latin. We see the Celts through the eyes of their enemies: it is like writing a history of twentieth century America based on Russian chronicles.

Aspects of the Celts were admired, but at best they are represented as noble savages cowed by the might of classical civilization. It is a tradition





Celtic sword with antennae hilt, typical of their Bronze Age technology.



Celtic bronze helmets. Characteristic of the Celts, their helmets and mail armour inspired the Romans to copy them.

mirrored in Mediterranean art. When King Attalus I of Pergamum defeated a force of Galatians in around 230 BC, he commemorated his victory with a series of sculpture. In actual fact, the victory was short-lived and the Galatians continued powerful until the next century, but the Pergamene sculptures of defeated Gauls were copied throughout the Greek and Roman world.

The most famous of these images—'The Dying Gaul'—shows a naked Celtic warrior kneeling wounded and subdued on his shield. Only the Celtic torque round his neck suggests the strength that had to be conquered to render this figure pathetic. A Roman marble copy of this sculpture now stands in the Capitoline Museum in Rome to remind us all continually of the defeated Celtic people: supposedly a naked, savage race inevitably overwhelmed by the higher civilization of the Mediterranean. Another sculpture copied from the Pergamum group, now also in Rome, shows a Celt with characteristic wild hair and moustache (Romans and Greeks

never wore moustaches without beards). This time the figure has slain his wife and is stabbing himself in the chest rather than be taken alive. A gallant and brave but eventual loser—just as the Romans wanted them.

### Not unified

The true standing and culture of the pre-literate Celts can only be deduced from archaeological discoveries. That they emerge as a recognisable collection of tribes in the first millennium BC is revealed by a series of finds in central Europe. These consist predominantly of bronze and iron metalwork and their famous hill-fort settlements. The people were called Keltoi by the Greeks and Galli by the Romans. That all these peoples of central Europe were called Celts is because from the fifth century BC onwards they were identified as speaking variations of the same Celtic tongue: an Indo-European language distinct from that of the Germans and the people of the Mediterranean, and now surviving only in the language of the Gaelic Irish

and Scots, the Welsh and the Bretons.

The ancient Celts were not a unified people. They did not rule an All-Celtic Empire. Their many hill-forts attest to the fact that Celtic tribes throughout Europe fought and raided against each other as much as they did against the Romans, Greeks and Germans. Nevertheless, archaeological finds maintain that they did share a similar culture as well as a common language. That they did not develop the art of writing does not mean that this culture was any inferior to that of the Romans or Greeks.

Technologically and economically, they were equal to their southern neighbours and in peace a thriving trade was continued between them. As an alternative to literature, the Celts developed highly skilled patterns of speech. Their verbal eloquence was valued and respected not only by themselves but also by the Romans and other literate races. Without doubt, however, it was the Celtic lack of written records that contributed to their apparent and real decline in influence and power from the third century BC onwards. Indeed, it is remarkable that the Celts retained any of their potent presence in European history in the face of Latin culture and warfare.

Before the Roman war-machine reached its zenith, the Celts enjoyed a golden age of martial prowess. From a heartland in central Europe, Celtic warriors carried their culture and influence into France, Spain, and Britain. Native tribesmen were unable to resist their long iron swords. By the fifth century BC, the Celts had overcome the Etruscans in northern Italy and settled the land of the river Po. In 390 BC, Rome was sacked and several Roman armies humbled. Why were these Celtic warriors so successful? We are told they were fierce fighters. But, above everything else, they were horse-warriors—superb horse-warriors. So renowned were they that they were employed as mercenary cavalry by Greeks and Romans throughout antiquity. Strabo states that the Celts were better horsemen than foot-soldiers and the best mercenary cavalry the Romans ever employed: a recommendation echoed by Caesar, who almost exclusively used Celtic horsemen in his Gallic campaigns.

### Celtic horsemanship

One of the earliest accounts of Celtic horsemanship to survive is recorded by Xenophon, a Greek historian and cavalry officer of the fourth century BC. In the war between Sparta and Thebes,



he records mercenary troops were sent by Dionysius of Syracuse to aid the Spartans. Xenophon's text makes a distinction between the Celts, Iberians, and horsemen sent, but this seems a later manuscript error and they are all one and the same: Celtic or Celtiberian horse-warriors. Xenophon describes their performance against a Theban army plundering a plain near Corinth.

'Few though they were,' he wrote, 'they were scattered here and there. They charged towards the Thebans, threw their javelins, and then dashed away as the enemy moved towards them, often turning around and throwing more javelins. While pursuing these tactics, they sometimes dismounted for a rest. But if anyone charged upon them while they were resting, they would easily leap onto their horses and retreat. If enemy warriors pursued them far from the Theban army, these horsemen would then turn around and wrack them with their javelins. Thus they manipulated the entire Theban army, compelling it to advance or fall back at their will.'

Xenophon is a trustworthy chronicler of military horsemanship as he was himself a cavalry officer and wrote a treatise on the subject. Later, in his account of Greek wars of the 360s, he gives an example of how horsemen are best used in battle. As a force of Arcadians give way to the Spartans, a group of Celtic horsemen are sent after the fleeing Greeks, cutting down the running foot-soldiers. Five hundred years later, Pausanias gave an equally vivid and interesting account of Celtic horsemen.

'To each horseman were attached two servants,' he wrote. 'These were themselves skilled riders and each had a horse. When the horse-warriors were engaged in combat, the servants remained behind. However, should a horse fall, then a servant brought a new horse for the warrior to mount. And if the warrior were killed, a servant mounted the horse in his master's place. If both rider and horse were hurt then one servant would ride out to replace him, while another led the wounded warrior back to camp. Thus the Celts kept up their strength throughout a battle.'

This description may have been based on earlier chroniclers nearer the time of the Celtic invasion of Greece, or it may have been inspired by contemporary Celtic horsemanship in the second century AD. Whatever its source, it clearly demonstrates a sophisticated use of cavalry. It shows that Celtic horsemen

possessed a high social and economic status like that of a medieval knight in relation to his squire and attendants. It suggests that Celtic horsemen fought in military units similar to the medieval 'lance' in which a heavily armed horse-warrior was supported by lighter cavalymen who were also grooms.

The power and importance of the Celtic horse and rider is dynamically represented in Celtic art. From the great white horses carved into the chalk slopes of southern England to the tiny representations of horse-warriors on Celtic gold coins: both are symbols of dominance over the native population and the means by which it was achieved. As to the horse equipment itself, much ingenuity and craftsmanship was lavished on it. Sophisticated flexible iron horse bits from France have been dated from the fifth to the third centuries BC.

In Scotland is preserved a fascinating piece of bronze armour for a horse's head. It is magnificently decorated with swirling patterns and has two curved horns attached to it. As in most societies, it appears that horsemanship was predominantly the preserve of aristocratic, wealthy warriors. An intriguing glimpse of what an ancient Celtic horse-warrior may have looked like in all his finery is provided by a relief on the Gundestrup Cauldron.

Found in a Danish peat-bog and dated to the second century BC, the cauldron depicts Celtic warriors of central Europe. The horsemen wear short, tight-fitting linen tunics. Some may also have worn the knee-length trousers of the foot soldiers lined up beneath them. On their heads, the horsemen wear iron helmets with elaborate bird and boar crests. According to the head decorations on the Aylesford bucket, some helmets also had huge curled horns. The horsemen wear spurs but, of course, no stirrups. Bridle and harness are decorated with metal plates. Chieftains and noble soldiers probably also wore torques around their necks and shirts of mail.

On the Gundestrup Cauldron, the horse-warriors are clearly in command, wearing the most expensive arms. Beneath them are foot-soldiers armed only with spears and large rectangular shields. They wear no helmets. At the end of the line of foot-soldiers is a warrior wearing a helmet with boar's head crest. He presumably belongs to the same class as the horse-warriors and is some kind of officer. Behind him

are three foot-soldiers blowing 'on long trumpets shaped like a horse's head. This is the clearest Celtic record we have of the composition of an ancient Celtic army.

### **Celtic chariots**

The excellence of Celtic horsemanship extended to their famous use of chariots. 'The chariots of the Britons,' wrote Julius Caesar, 'begin the fighting by charging over the battlefield. From them they hurl javelins; although the noise of the wheels and chariot teams are enough to throw any enemy into panic. The charioteers are very skilled. They can drive their teams down very steep slopes without losing control. Some warriors can run along the chariot pole, stand on the yoke and then dart back into the chariot.'

Primarily, it seems, Celtic chariots were for display, intended to overawe and enemy in the prelude to battle. Once involved in combat—according to Caesar and Diodorus of Sicily—a chariot team would dismount to fight, using it more as a means of fast retreat or advance rather than as a weapon. However, those noble warriors who rode in a chariot probably did not fight on foot but mounted their horses and fought with their usual retinue of horsemen. The chariot therefore was used only for a spectacular arrival on the battlefield and was driven away when fighting commenced.

That Celtic chariots ever possessed scythes attached to their wheels seems a myth suggested by the addition of these blades to the hubs and yokes of Persian and Syrian chariots. No archaeological evidence has been discovered of scythed wheels. Although, curiously, an early medieval Irish epic tale, featuring the hero Cuchullain, does refer to a war chariot with 'iron sickles, thin blades, hooks and hard spikes. Its stinging nails fastened to the poles and thongs and bows and lines of the chariot, lacerating heads and bones and bodies.' Most Latin references to Celtic chariots mention them only as a speciality of the Britons, but the remains of chariots have been found in Celtic tombs throughout Europe.

Light, elegant two-wheeled chariots, like those that impressed Caesar, developed from heavier, four-wheeled carts found in Celtic tombs dating from before the fifth century BC. The later two-wheeled vehicles were expertly made. Their spoken wooden wheels were bound with iron tyres. The hubs were also bound with iron bands while the wheels were held on the axle by iron





**Impressive ramparts of Maiden Castle in Dorset, typical of the many Celtic hill forts that dominated the European landscape before the Roman Empire.**

linchpins. The platform was of wood, usually with curved wood or wicker sides. Two horses pulled the chariot, linked by a yoke to a wooden pole. To these basics were added splendidly crafted rein-rings, flexible bridle-bits, and harness fittings, many decorated with red, yellow and blue enamel. The best contemporary illustrations of Celtic chariots occur on Celtic coins. In the British Museum, a chariot is depicted on a tiny bronze coin of the Remi tribe in northern France of the first century BC.

Such images were usually based on the chariots appearing on the reverse of Greek coins, the model for most Gallic

coinage. But, in this case, the Celtic craftsman has chosen not to reproduce slavishly the realism of Greek art, but to reduce the chariot to its most vital elements. The horses are portrayed as a series of dynamic balls: muscular thighs, flaring nostrils, and plaited mane. The chariot is represented by one wheel and its semi-circular side, while the driver has been abstracted to arms holding a whip, a head, and three curved rays springing from his back, that is, his cloak flying in the wind.

The evolution of Celtic cavalry and chariotry suggests an origin for this culture in the plains of eastern

Europe and Russia, the traditional home of chariot burials and excellent horsemanship. Like all Indo-European speaking people, the Celts were originally from the Eurasian steppes. That the Celts did not lose their talent for riding over their centuries of settlement in central Europe is no doubt due to their close contact with the Cimmerian and Scythian tribes that dominated eastern Europe. It is interesting to note, however, that as with the eastern German tribes of later centuries, the Celts did not adopt the deadly horse-archery characteristic of the steppe tribes. Perhaps they, like the



Germans, considered it unmanly for a noble horse-warrior to kill an enemy from afar. Celtic mastery of the horse in battle is a potent thread throughout the history of Celtic warfare, from antiquity to sixteenth-century Ireland. It was this horsemanship that gave the Celts the military power to establish themselves so firmly in European civilization.

### Golden age

For a further 50 years after that raid on Greece, Celtic warriors held absolute control over central Europe, France, Spain and Britain. It was a golden age for the Celts in which their civilization clearly rivalled that of the Greeks and Romans. But then it started to go wrong. Gradually, an ever more confident, ever more united and ambitious Roman Republic made inroads into Celtic territory. The first region to be lost was northern Italy.

By 200 BC, after a fierce campaign, virtually all the Italian Celtic tribes had submitted. The Roman war-machine had not only proved superior, but the Romans had even beaten the Celts at their own game. Challenged to single combat by the chieftain of the Insubres, M Claudius Marcellus accepted. In the killing ground between the assembled

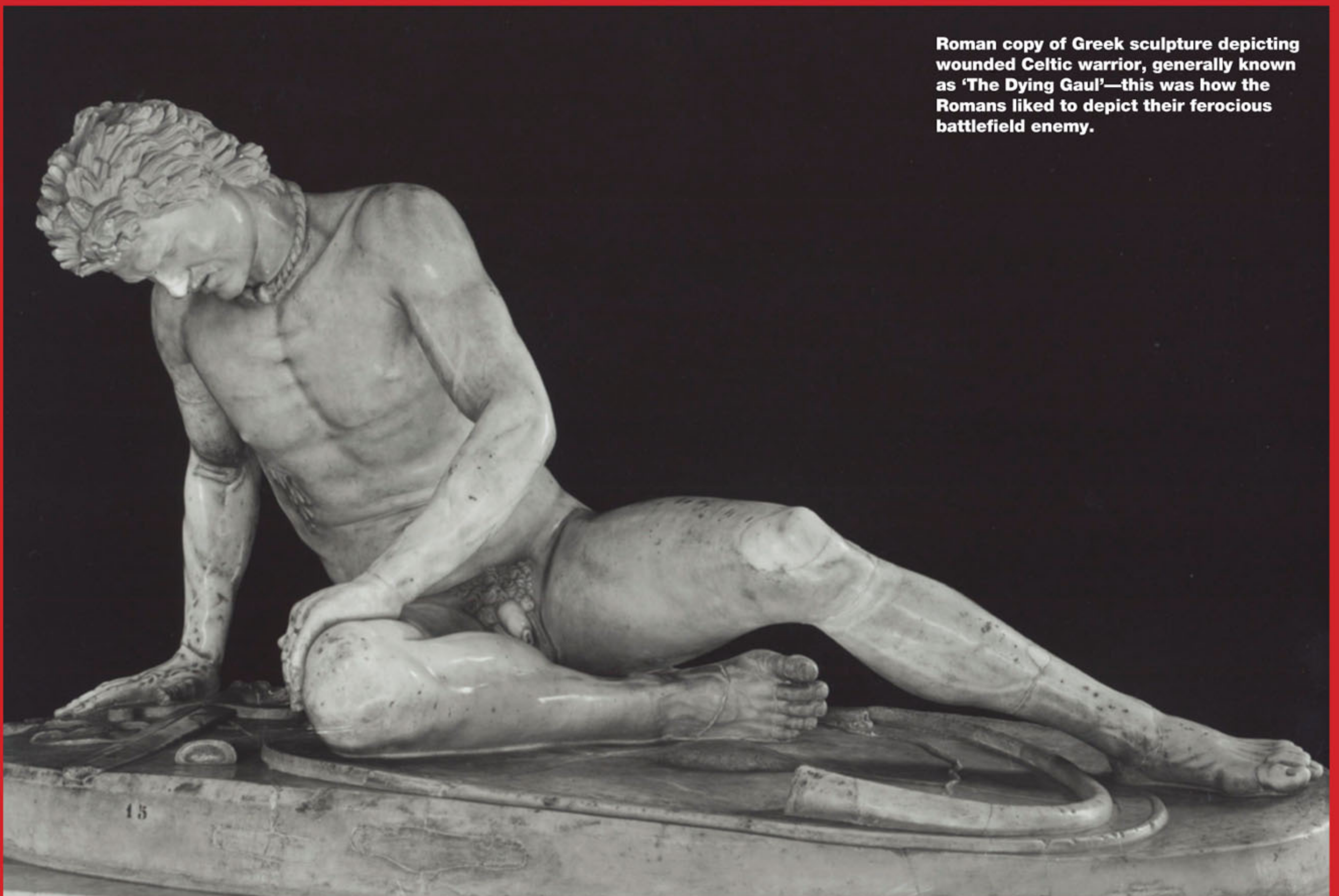
armies, the Roman general rode forward with his shield, spear and sword. Viridomarus, the north Italian Celtic leader, bellowed that he had been born from the waters of the Rhine and would make quick work of the Roman usurper. He dashed in front of his warriors, hurling his spear. But both their spears missed and the chieftains clashed. As each side cheered his leader on, the duel came to a sudden end. A Roman sword slit the Celtic throat and his bent golden torque fell to the ground.

The next Celtic realm to lost control of its own destiny was Spain. Here, many powers converged. Celtic tribesmen had been established in Spain by the fifth century BC. They could not overwhelm the whole native population of this vast country but appear to have made themselves a ruling class over the Iberians in northern and western Spain. Over the years their cultures fused, and ancient historians generally refer to these people as Celtiberians. Along the Mediterranean coast, rivalry between Rome and Carthage over the Spanish ports exploded in war.

By the start of the Second Punic War, the Carthaginians controlled most of Spain bar the north-west and Celtiberian mercenaries provided some

of their fiercest warriors. However, there were other Celtiberians who resented Carthaginian exploitation of their land and welcomed the intervention of the Romans in Spain. They fought together to rid the land of the Punic invaders. It was an alliance the Celts would regret.

Although their triumphs in the Punic Wars left the Romans with unparalleled power in the Mediterranean, it also left them with many problems. The Celts of northern Italy, ignored during Hannibal's invasion, now rebelled. It took ten years to reconquer them. In Spain, the Celtiberians retained their independence and would not enter into any contract of obedience with the victorious Romans. They had not seen the back of one master merely to submit to another. If the Romans wanted the whole of Spain, they would have to conquer it by arms and not diplomacy. 'This war between the Romans and Celtiberians is called the fiery war,' wrote the contemporary historian Polybius, 'for while wars in Greece or Asia are settled with one or two pitched battles, the battles there dragged on, only brought to a temporary end by the darkness of night. Both sides refused to let their courage flag or their bodies tire.' •



**Roman copy of Greek sculpture depicting wounded Celtic warrior, generally known as 'The Dying Gaul'—this was how the Romans liked to depict their ferocious battlefield enemy.**



# Great Military Artists



## Francisco Goya

**G**oya was one of Spain's most eminent artists and the most trenchant critic ever of man's inhumanity to man. In his dark and mordant series of 65 etchings called 'The Disasters of War', he recorded the dreadful atrocities committed during the Peninsular War of 1808-14. Other artists of the time celebrated the glory and pageantry of warfare—Goya saw only the tragedy, suffering, the cruelty and needless death. When asked why he depicted such depravity, he replied, 'To teach men forever that they should not be barbarians.'

### Spanish Inquisition

Born in Fuendetodos, near Saragossa, in 1746, he entered the studio of Jose Luzan Martinez at the age of 16. As a result of his dissolute student life, he had to flee the country and traveled to Italy. On his return to Madrid in 1775, he was employed on a number of paintings for the royal tapestry factory as well as on a number of portraits. His reputation flourished and in 1789 he was appointed court painter to Charles IV. The eroticism of his 'Maja Nude' and 'Maja Clothed'

caused such outrage that he was grilled by the Inquisition.

Rendered totally deaf by a long, severe illness, Goya observed with penetrating eyes the corruption and abuse of power in royal circles to which he was privy as first painter to the king. When Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808, Goya, despite his repugnance for the Spanish court, was strongly influenced by the patriotic fervour that compelled his countrymen to wage their desperate resistance to the invaders.

The Peninsular War was triggered by Napoleon's desire to impose a French king upon Spain (his elder brother Joseph). It proved a major mistake for Bonaparte, becoming his suppurating 'Spanish Ulcer,' as it provoked the Spaniards into angry active rebellion and brought the British to Portugal in order to liberate the Iberian peninsula.

The guerrilla war that raged in Spain was savage and merciless. Hatred drove the partisans to acts of monstrous brutality against the French soldiers, and the invaders retaliated with matching terror. Goya recorded the awful scenes in pen and paint. His shadowy masterpiece, lit by a single lantern, 'The Shootings of

May 3rd 1808', depicting a French firing squad executing a group of civilians, now hangs in the Prado Museum, Madrid.

### Wellington portrait

The end of the war in 1814 and the return of Ferdinand VII did not bring the expected freedom and justice. The king sought ruthless vengeance against all those who had in any way collaborated with the French and those suspected of holding liberal ideas. Goya himself was interrogated—he had reluctantly served Joseph Bonaparte and had painted several portraits of French generals (he also painted the Duke of Wellington). He was given a French decoration but never wore it. Disillusioned by the new despotic regime, Goya withdrew from public life to compose an epilogue to 'Disasters of War,' in which his indictment dealt equally with the monstrosity of war and the tyranny of its aftermath.

Goya died in 1828 aged 82. He completed some 500 oil paintings and murals, nearly 300 etchings and lithographs. Much of his major work is housed in the Prado Museum, Madrid •

*Peter Newark*



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# Re-enactors

## Global Greeks

Movies such as 300 have inspired a passion for recreating ancient Greek warriors, says PHILIPP ELLIOT-WRIGHT

**T**oday, Greek Hoplitae of the 5th century BC—who defied the might of the Persian Empire at the battles of Thermopylae and Marathon—are being increasingly recreated. Whilst none of the respective groups can field more than 12-15 warriors, regardless of country, all are united by an attention to detail and a commitment to reflecting historical research in carefully constructed clothing and equipment.

### Making armour

Due to the modest numbers recreating this era, there are few sutlers supplying quality clothing or equipment to purchase 'off the peg', and what there are, are expensive. For example, the distinctive white linethorax body armour with its many layers of linen and canvas are generally stitched together by fellow members, rather than commercial suppliers. In respect of the classical Corinthian kranos (helmet), whilst some armourers do produce quality items, they are far from cheap. It is equally true for those who choose to wear the metallised bronze cuirass, which was becoming outdated by the 5th century, but was still in use. Thus, once greaves, kopis (swords), aspis (shields) and the dory (spear) are added, it takes considerable commitment to accurately portray a Hoplite.

Once the full panoply is assembled, however, the portrayal is stunning, with the brightly painted dory and shining linethorax and cuirass. Added to this, is the visual delight of the individual differences between warriors, the Roman concept of uniformity lay centuries in the future, thus no two warriors wore identical clothing or equipment, or painted the exact same design on their shield. Members of the respective groups adopt the well-established approach that provided a participant can

show appropriate archaeological support for any given reproduced item, then it is acceptable.

In modern Greece, whilst there are, inevitably, some rather poor quality portrayals of Hoplitae paraded for the tourists, there have long been historical research groups with a tradition of fielding members in carefully researched clothing and equipment of the highest quality. The projects undertaken have been extensive, including the building and crewing of a full size trireme. Critically, for conscientious Greek re-enactors across the world, decades of primary research has demonstrated that, whilst bronze was the original metal of choice for kranos, cuirass, linethorax scales and greaves, the actual contemporary consistency of ancient bronze was often closer to modern brass. This has enabled, with some justification, the use of far cheaper brass for reproductions without the sacrifice of too much authenticity, albeit the modern metal is substantially heavier and consequently significantly more exhausting to carry.

### British Hoplitae

In Britain, the primary Greek group are the Hoplite Association. They have pursued the highest standards and can field upwards of a dozen Hoplitae. Their members though have branched out, and a few portray the primary enemy of the Greeks, the Persians, in their brightly coloured outfits. The problem is few wish to undertake the role of the 'baddies', thus there is little room for meaningful combat displays against the great enemy.

In Australia, there is the Ancient Hoplitikon of Melbourne, a member of the Australasian Living History Federation, who, alongside the Sydney



Ancients, are the primary southern hemisphere Greek re-enactment groups. The Hoplitikon of Melbourne is based in Victoria and can field over a dozen warriors itself and can work with other groups to field even more. Thus, at the 15th Australasian Historical Conference in 2009, the Sydney Ancients, Mare Nostrum of Brisbane and Hoplitikon of Melbourne combined for the battle of Marathon with the objective of simulating the conditions of Hoplitae in Phalanx formation under the stress of actual arrow fire. With typical Australian sang froid, the few real arrow injuries were shrugged off!

In America, home for many modern Greek immigrants, the attraction is obvious. One group, the Greek Warriors, based in New York, have staged substantive events that have drawn participants from states as diverse as Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Washington DC. Whilst modest in number, together they managed to field around 15 Hoplitae for events such as the annual celebration of Greek Independence Day in New York. At the end of the day, as with many Roman groups, re-enacting the ancient Greek Hoplitae reminds the audience of their shared common culture •

### Further information

**Hoplite Association,**

visit [www.hoplites.org](http://www.hoplites.org)

**Ancient Hoplitikon of Melbourne,**

visit [www.hoplitikon.com](http://www.hoplitikon.com)

**New York Greek Warriors,**

visit [www.thegreekwarriors.com](http://www.thegreekwarriors.com)





## DAY OF THE JACKAL...

Marcus Nicholls unwraps Accurate Armour's recent 1:35 kit of the British Army's Jackal 1 'MWMIK' (Mobility Weapon-Mounted Installation Kit)

**T**he Jackal is a British Army weapons-carrying patrol vehicle that performs long-range surveillance and reconnaissance missions.

It can carry a significant amount of firepower; a 7.62mm GPMG (operated by the vehicle commander) plus either a 12.7mm machine gun, 40mm grenade launcher or another light or heavy machine. The vehicle is powered by a 5.9 litre Cummins diesel and has an impressive range of 800 kilometres. It's currently deployed in Afghanistan.

Accurate Armour's model is cast entirely from grey/green resin and comes with very busy sheet of photo-etched brass detail parts, plus styrene and brass rod, thread, clear, orange and red light-lenses and waterslide decals.

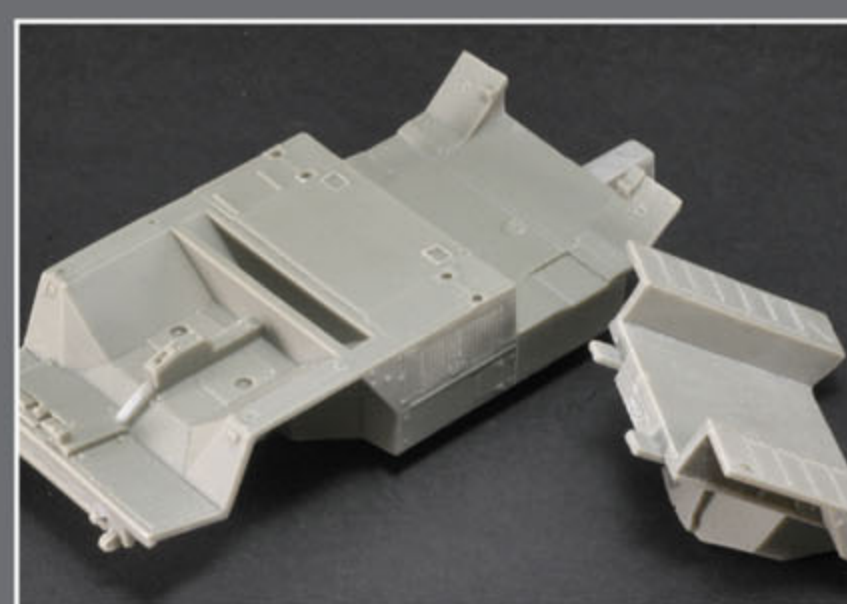
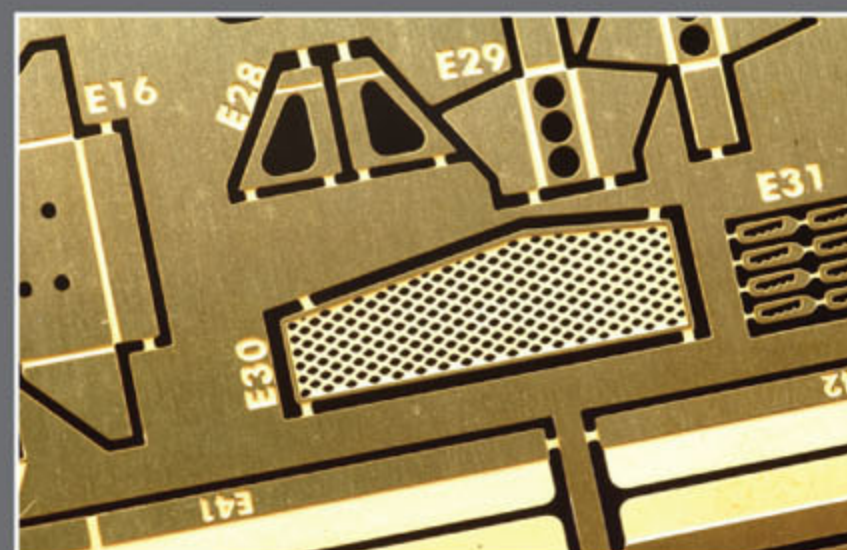
The detail incorporated in the castings is superb, the non-slip flooring being particularly well done. The kit is designed so the suspension can be depicted in three



modes; standard on-road (body low), standard off-road (mid-height) and extreme off-road (body high). Some modification of the suspension parts will be needed but it's a nice inclusion.

Some clean-up of the resin parts will be required and all you need for this is a fresh No.11 scalpel blade plus rat-tail and flat files. The instructions are of the photographic style and are very clear and easy to follow. It's a great kit of this odd-looking vehicle and a very current subject! •

ACCURATE ARMOUR 1:35 JACKAL 1 4X4 SRV (K176)  
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# Militaria

## Interesting Provenance

In November, Marlow's of Stafford held a sale of some 650 lots and, of that total, over 560 were items of militaria. The price range of this section ran from £25 to a maximum of £900, the highest price of the sale, paid for a cased set of silver badges and coins representing the battles of each regiment, 52 pieces in all. A good set of Leicester Yeomanry badges, estimated at £90-£120, sold for £480. There were many lots selling for less than £100 and by today's economic standards this meant that for the collector with limited means there were plenty of opportunities to acquire new pieces.

The smaller section of arms and armour offered some interesting pieces with the most expensive being a display mounted de-activated World War Two Jungle



**Greek or Turkish flintlock pistol with silver decoration, £1,750.** (Wallis and Wallis)

carbine complete with bayonet and two clips of inert ammunition. Estimated at £120-£180, it sold for £500, showing once again that the possibility of some extra controls on 'de-acts' is not depressing demand. These rooms hold four sales a year and the next is this month.

### Campaign Medals

Also in November, Wallis and Wallis held one of their general sales of armour and militaria with some 600 lots, over 350 comprising militaria pieces. The sale got off to a good start with the second lot, a group of medal to a Corporal Marsh of the North Staffordshire Regiment, selling for £1,450. This was but one of a number of British campaign medals. The highest priced lot was a group of medals to James Rennie for service with the India Navy who served with distinction in the 19th century Persian and Chinese campaigns, which sold for £3,100. Close behind was a group to another member of the same family who saw action with

the Black Watch during the South African war. This group sold for £2,600.

Much of the earlier part of the sale was devoted to badges and general militaria. One small item which sold for £20 was a length of the silk cord of a World War Two German parachute mine and there are signs of a growing demand for items of ARP or Civil Defence and the Home Front. There were a couple of lots of similar items in the Marlow sale. There are similar trends in the collecting of police material with rare helmet plates making exceptional prices and there are matching increases in the prices realised by decorated 19th century truncheons. One in this sale with painted GR and Streatham Special Constable made a very good £390. Its specific location to a London district increased its value.

Among the arms was a Greek or Albanian flintlock pistol heavily decorated with panels of white metal and silver. The lock was of French manufacture but the stock and barrel were typical with much embossed

decoration and no ramrod. This is yet another example of the increasing demand for these weapons which a few years ago were hardly rated. Interest has been stimulated by recently published research which has gone a long way to establishing certain recognisable features of the style and decoration of these pistols permitting much stronger identification of origins. This example went for £1,750.

### Third Reich

Among the small amount of Third Reich material were three Hitler Youth knives distributed in their thousands in the 1930s and normally little regarded by collectors but this group made an interesting point relative to provenance. The first sold for £110 and the second went for £200, whereas the third sold for £525. The reason for the great difference was that the third had etched and gold decoration of the city arms of Berlin with the Olympic symbol, and to make it even more attractive it still had its printed



**Helmet of officer of 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers), £1,050.** (Wallis and Wallis)

paper packet. This was thought to be one presented to members of the Hitler Youth who helped in the 1936 Olympics. A reminder that even the most apparently ordinary bladed weapon may repay drawing it out from the scabbard for a closer look.



**Haenel air pistol with original box, £350.** (Wallis and Wallis)

There were a number of early air weapons but demand seems to have slackened somewhat as they all sold at quite reasonable price. The highest price was £350 for a good example of the German Haenel Model 28 air pistol with its original cardboard box and some accessories. Among the antique firearms, the most expensive item was a William IV Paget flintlock carbine and its rarity ensured that, although not in pristine condition, it attracted some healthy bidding before the hammer fell at £1,400 •

*Frederick Wilkinson*



# Museums & Shows

## Guernsey Militia

JOHN NORRIS visits the Channel Islands

**W**hen researching the historical background of any regiment, it is always best to go to the official Regimental Museum. On Guernsey, artefacts relating to the island's Militia force can be found in different displays but these only tell part of the regiment's history. For the full story behind this local force, one is best advised to visit the exhibition at Castle Cornet. The exhibition covers two floors and tells the history of the Royal Guernsey Militia from its creation to the raising of the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry and the men who left the island to serve in France in the First World War.

### Defence of island

The new exhibition was opened in July 2009 by the Earl and Countess of Wessex and explains the regiment's involvement in the battle of Cambrai in 1917, along with other engagements. This is a full

interactive display, which allows access to archive material through touch-screen monitors. There are the more usual artefacts on display, including medals, weapons, photographs and uniforms from across the periods including paintings.

Like its counterpart in Jersey, service in the Guernsey Militia was compulsory for the defence of the island for men aged between 16 and 60 years of age. It dates back to around the 13th century and over the centuries has provided troops for the defence of the island during the many crises Guernsey faced, such as the Napoleonic Wars when the troops of the Militia were on constant alert. In 1831, King William IV granted the regiment the prefix title of Royal. Other locally raised regiments included Light Dragoons and a Royal Guernsey Artillery Regiment, the history of which is told through paintings and photographs, extracts from diaries and regimental trophies.



The island is understandably proud of its local forces and the RGLI served as a regiment in its own right and gained Ypres, Cambrai, Lys and Flanders as Battle Honours in the First World War. In one battle alone in late 1917, it suffered around 200 killed, and this chapter in the island's military history is told in photographs and personal accounts. The Royal Guernsey Militia Collection is housed in Castle Cornet, St. Peter Port, Guernsey GY1 1AU and is accessible on foot and for times of opening can be contacted by telephone on 01481 721657 or visit [www.museum.guernsey.net/castle.htm](http://www.museum.guernsey.net/castle.htm)

## February UK Diary

### ■ 3: Thursday

Lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum at Chelsea in London with guest speaker, Professor Tony Stockwell presenting a talk entitled 'The Key to the Malayan Emergency'. Presentation begins at 12.30pm with free entrance. Further details telephone 020 7730 0717 or visit [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)

### ■ 5 and 6: Saturday & Sunday

FEBEX 2011 is being held by the Alton Model Railway Group at Eggars School, Alton, Hants GU34 4EQ. Layouts, displays, trade stands and demonstrations. Further details visit [www.altonmrg.co.uk](http://www.altonmrg.co.uk)

### ■ 6: Sunday

Bedford Militaria Fair is at the Bunyan Centre, Mile Road, Bedford MK42 9TS. Doors open between 09.30am and 3pm with £3 entrance charge. Wide range of collectables. Further details telephone 01832 274050 or visit [www.arms-and-armour-uk.com](http://www.arms-and-armour-uk.com)

### ■ 7: Monday

The Stockport Militaria Collectors Society is having an evening talk with guest speaker Lloyd

Powell presenting the topic Edward III and the Fall of Calais 1346-1347. Meeting convenes at 7.45pm at the Britannia Hotel, Dialstone Lane, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6AG. Further details telephone 01709 557622.

### ■ 11: Thursday

Lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum at Chelsea in London with guest speaker, Robert Hann, presenting a talk entitled 'SAS Operation Galia; Bravery Behind Enemy Lines in the Second World War'. Presentation begins at 12.30pm with free entrance. Further details telephone 020 7730 0717 or visit [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)

### ■ 13: Saturday

South of England Militaria Arms and Armour Fair is being held at the Historic Dockyard, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TZ. Further details telephone 07595 511981.

The International Birmingham Antique Arms and Militaria Fair is being held at the National Motorcycle Museum off Junction 6 of the M42 Motorway, B92 0EJ. Doors open between 10am and 3.30pm, entrance charge £4. Further details telephone 07710 274452.

### ■ 17: Thursday

Lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum at Chelsea in London with guest speaker, Kevin Brazier, presenting a talk entitled 'Sidney Godley; The First Private VC of the Great War'. Presentation begins at 12.30pm with free entrance. Further details telephone 020 7730 0717 or visit [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)

### ■ 19: Saturday

Model Show is being held at the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Ilchester, Yeovilton, Somerset BA22 8HT. Club exhibits, trade stands, displays and competitions. Doors open at 10am entrance charge includes admission to the museum. Further details telephone 01935 840565 or visit [www.fleetairarm.com](http://www.fleetairarm.com)

### ■ 26 and 27: Saturday & Sunday

'Trucks 'N' Tracks' Military Vehicle Modelling Show is being held at the Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone, Kent. Doors open 10am. Competitions, displays and traders along with much more. Further details telephone 0844 848 8831 or visit [www.trucksntracks.co.uk](http://www.trucksntracks.co.uk)

*Continued on p58*



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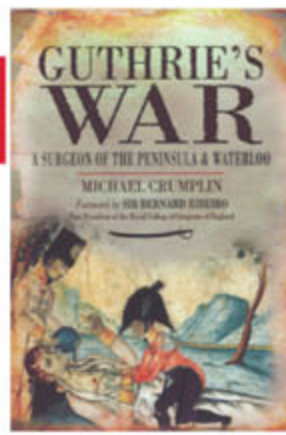




# Book Reviews

## Guthrie's War

by Michael Crumplin  
(Pen & Sword),  
hardback, 194pp,  
£19.99

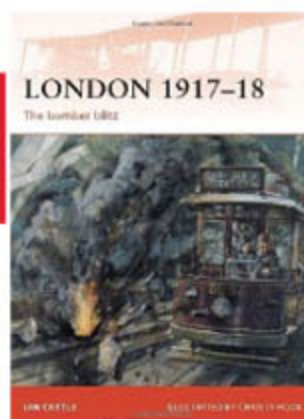


The author has established himself as an expert on early military medicine and this volume continues his work with a study of pioneering military surgeon George James Guthrie, who served the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular War. Largely overshadowed by the achievements of the French medical services, Guthrie was notable for keeping a set of records on all his operations on soldiers, which provided a highly useful body of data on battlefield trauma. Crumplin has mined this body of work to produce graphic descriptions of operations carried out on soldiers, some of them of very high rank. It is a vivid reminder of the reality of war and the price soldiers pay to serve their country. All in all, an outstanding account of one of the unsung heroes of the Napoleonic Wars.

Tim Newark

## London 1917-18: the Bomber Blitz

by Ian Castle (Osprey  
Campaign) softback,  
96pp, £14.99



## Remember Scarborough

by Bob Clarke (Amberley  
Publishing) softback,  
128pp, £12.99

The 1940 onwards Blitz of Britain by the Nazis is well-known, but these books look at the airborne attacks of the earlier conflict. Somewhat bizarrely to modern eyes, this initially involved Zeppelin raids. Then, in June 1917, the Germans switched to using large bi-plane bombers: the Gothas and also aptly-named Giant with its 42 metre wingspan. Although they were capable of inflicting substantial damage, these behemoths were vulnerable to being downed by Allied fighter planes. The last and largest raid of the war took place in May 1918 and was utterly defeated.

British losses in aircraft and amongst civilians were light, but the terror factor did create exaggerated fears when the bombers returned two decades later. The east coast of Britain also suffered from naval attack early in the war. The shelling of Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool in December 1914, evoked outrage as a bestial and unjustified offensive, the Imperial German Navy being described as 'baby killers' by First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. Bob Clarke's account brings home the impact on the communities and their relationship to the arms race at the time. Both books are well-illustrated, the Osprey with colour reconstructions and meticulous maps in addition to contemporary photographs. The Yorkshire published volume is also nicely produced and has a good selection of photographs and engravings depicting the events it describes.

Matthew Bennett

## Tyneside Irish

by John Sheen  
(Pen & Sword)  
hardback, 368pp,  
£25.00



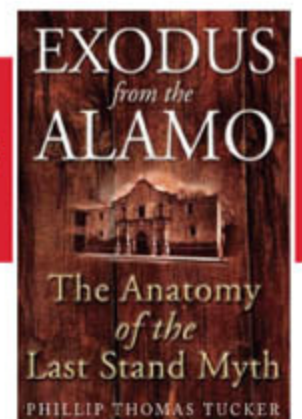
John Sheen has done a great service to men from the North East who served in the 24th, 25th 26th and 27th Battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers. This is a first class history. Not only does this book chart the role of these regiments, it provides an immense amount of supporting detail. This detail concentrates on the human element and through a mass of photographs, personal letters and official documents, the author weaves together a story of great bravery and tragedy. It is a narrative that is easy to read and such is the level of detail the reader is encouraged to relate to the characters throughout the book, so gaining an insight into the lives of the battalion's officers and men and also an appreciation of the communities they came from and left behind. The author not only covers the action in which a soldier died but follows this with the telegram from the war office, the note in the newspaper and the

order of service from the funeral. John Sheen also covers the execution of two Tyneside Brigade soldiers who were shot due to reasons of ill discipline. One was for partaking in the Etaples mutiny and the other was for desertion. Poignantly, the author provides the Medal Roll that notes how one soldier forfeited his medals prior to execution. Recommended.

Simon Taylor

## Exodus from the Alamo: the Anatomy of the Last Stand Myth

by Phillip T Tucker  
(Casemate) hardback,  
256pp, £25.00



Today, most people will have in their mind the 1960 film version of the battle in which John Wayne played Davy Crockett. Indeed, it was Wayne's pet project, through which he sought to broadcast his libertarian ideas about how American Republicanism should prosper. This has helped to promote the image of a fervent band of freedom fighters standing up to the Mexican dictator and inflicting huge casualties upon overwhelming forces in a gallant stand. In fact, as the author's carefully researched book proves, the defenders were panic-stricken and fleeing as Santa Anna's dawn attack swept over them in barely 20 minutes. Most of the Mexican casualties were 'fratricidal' (self-inflicted). Nor is he the first to express such a revisionist view for, as his bibliography demonstrates, historians have been critiquing the myth for at least two decades. Unfortunately, current political issues in the USA, especially in the South, urge the retention of such fondly-held fantasies. To a British reader, what is most striking is how much the 'race' issue mattered then and apparently still does now. Throughout the book, people are carefully delineated according to racial type: the Southerners being described as 'Anglo-Celts', for example. The Texans of 1836 supported slavery and were to fight a bitter civil war a generation later over the issue, while Mexico had abolished it a dozen years earlier. Who was then the liberator?

Matthew Bennett



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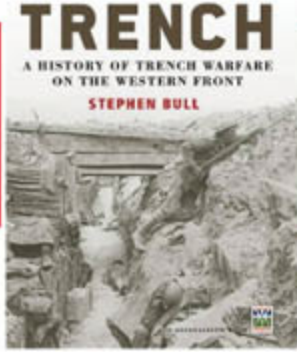
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# Book Reviews

## Trench: a history of Trench Warfare on the Western Front

by Stephen Bull  
(Osprey) hardback,  
272pp, £25.00

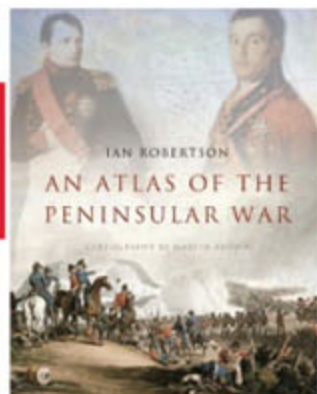


In truth, trench fighting is as old warfare itself, visible in the depictions of Egyptian and Assyrian sieges, and Julius Caesar once fought a draw in the trenches with Pompey on the Adriatic coast. Yet it is usually WW1 that most brings trench warfare to mind. The earlier fighting was mostly associated with sieges and in a sense the contest on the Western Front from late 1914 until the end of the war four years later, was in the form of the siege. The author presents a detailed but readable account of all aspects of the fighting, including raiding and sniping, mining, the horrors of poisonous gas and the impact of the tank. This beautifully illustrated study of an ugly topic provides fascinating insights into the terrors and techniques of trench warfare. Maps and diagrams enable the reader to examine the development of tactics, both in attack and defence, of both sides and all the armies involved in the conflict. The machine gun, in its various forms, was usually the key factor in deciding the outcome of the many battles, but there were many other ingenious weapons such as rifle grenades, bought into play. Detailed studies of trench weaponry also help the reader to grasp the complexities of what is a still too often considered as clumsy and ill-directed fighting.

Matthew Bennett

## An Atlas of the Peninsular War

by Ian Robertson  
(Yale) hardback,  
144pp with 77 maps, £25.00



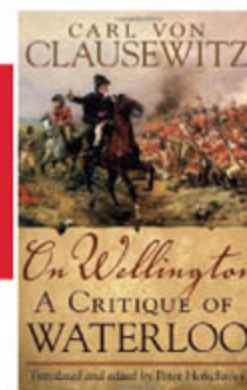
History's about chaps and Geography's about maps' is an old saying that in the case of Military History is completely wrong. No one should attempt to write about wars, campaigns and battles without providing topographical detail. The Iberian

Peninsula is a rugged and unforgiving terrain for men to march over: high mountains, large rivers often flowing through forbidding gorges and wide, hot, dusty plains. This volume deals with the British experience from 1808 to 1814, covering especially Wellington's campaigns, through which he eventually expelled the French, liberating both Portugal and Spain. Anyone who has read Oman's great work on the war will know how important it is to be aware of the countryside over which the armies marched and counter-marched and sometimes came into bloody contact; but his maps are scarce and not always useful. Now Ian Robertson has provided the perfect complement to that text, with his own summaries a model of concise clarity. His cartographer, Martin Brown has provided crystal clear and colourful maps of campaigns, battles and sieges that are simply superb. They form perfect reference for wargamers looking to reconstruct the conflicts. Anyone interested in the Peninsular War should buy this book.

Matthew Bennett

## On Wellington: a critique of Waterloo by Carl von Clausewitz

edited and translated  
by Peter Hofschroer  
(University of Oklahoma Press)  
hardback, 272pp, \$32.95



The editor's main contention is that: 'Napoleon "humbled" [Wellington], stole a march on him, and left the Allied commander floundering in the Netherlands, mistakes that could well have proved fatal had Wellington not had the nerve to use an unwitting Blucher to buy back lost time' (p210). As in his other publications, he inveighs against the 'Anglo-Saxon' myth which writes out the Prussian contribution to the Allied victory at Waterloo. This aside, von Clausewitz's study is clear and insightful, pointing out the errors made on all sides, including the Emperor, whose expectation of his own troops' superiority was unrealistic. The Prussian states that there were 70,000 men on

both sides in the centre, but that the Duke's forces 'were one third Hanoverian landwehr (militia) and new formations and a third newly raised Belgian troops, whose spirit, among officers and men alike, was not entirely reliable' (p155). However, his 'position was by all accounts very favourable... the narrow position allowing many troops to be left in reserve... mixing good and bad troops together' to strengthen the line (p161). While Wellington believed he beat Napoleon on his own, the arrival of the Prussians pulled away Imperial Guard reserves which could have produced a breakthrough, to defend the French right flank. Clausewitz's balanced conclusion is that the Emperor's focus on an unsophisticated full frontal attack was the fatal mistake that decided the day.

Matthew Bennett

## Feb UK Diary *continued*

### ■ 26 and 27: Saturday & Sunday

The Arms Heritage & Collectors Fair is being held at the Newark Showground, Notts, NG24 2NY. Doors open between 9am and 4.30pm. Further details telephone 01472 241439 or visit [www.theshootingshow.co.uk](http://www.theshootingshow.co.uk)

### ■ 27: Sunday

Chelmsford Militaria Fair is being held at the Marconi Social Club, Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, Essex. Doors open 10am to 2pm with £2.50 entrance. Further details telephone 07595 511981 or visit [www.chelmsfordmilitaria.com](http://www.chelmsfordmilitaria.com)

Militaria Collectors Swap Shop and Fair is being held at the Brecon Town Indoor Market Hall, Brecon, Wales. Doors open 10am to 2pm with books, models, collectables and much more. Further details telephone 01639 722479 or 01874 658342.

### ■ Please Note

The International Living History Fair has moved to a new venue at Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground, Bath Lane, near Lutterworth, Leics, LE17 5QS. Date yet to be confirmed at time of going to press. Further details telephone 01305 855817 or visit [www.livinghistoryfairs.com](http://www.livinghistoryfairs.com)

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### SS7005 - Great Battles of the World: Berlin 1945



By the dawn of 1945, the Western Allies had driven back Hitler's last, desperate effort in the Ardennes. However, the Allies' insistence on Germany's unconditional surrender deterred the Germans from making any concession over ending the war - Hitler and the Nazi faithful saw their only option to be a fanatical Wagnerian stand leaving only Germany's ruins to commemorate the tragedy. Further, it was already clear that another kind of war was right around the corner. The Soviets had already reached Budapest and the Oder River; it was obvious who would dominate Eastern Europe. The only hope for America and Britain to retain what they could of Central Europe was to take Berlin, but the 'Russian steamroller' forestalled them. Massive Soviet forces attacked the city in April 1945 - the last act of the confrontation between the Communists and the National Socialists and the first act of the Cold War. Illustrated with color and b/w photographs, color maps, 8 aircraft and 9 armor profiles, and 14 color uniform plates; Stavropoulos, Vourliotis, Terniotis, Kotoulas, Valmas, and Zouridis. Great Battles of the World; 128 pages.

### SS5605 - ELCO 80 PT Boat On Deck



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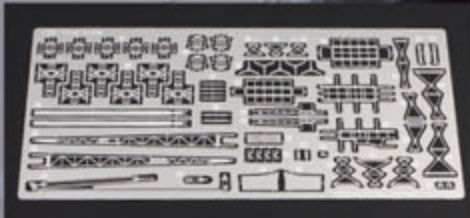
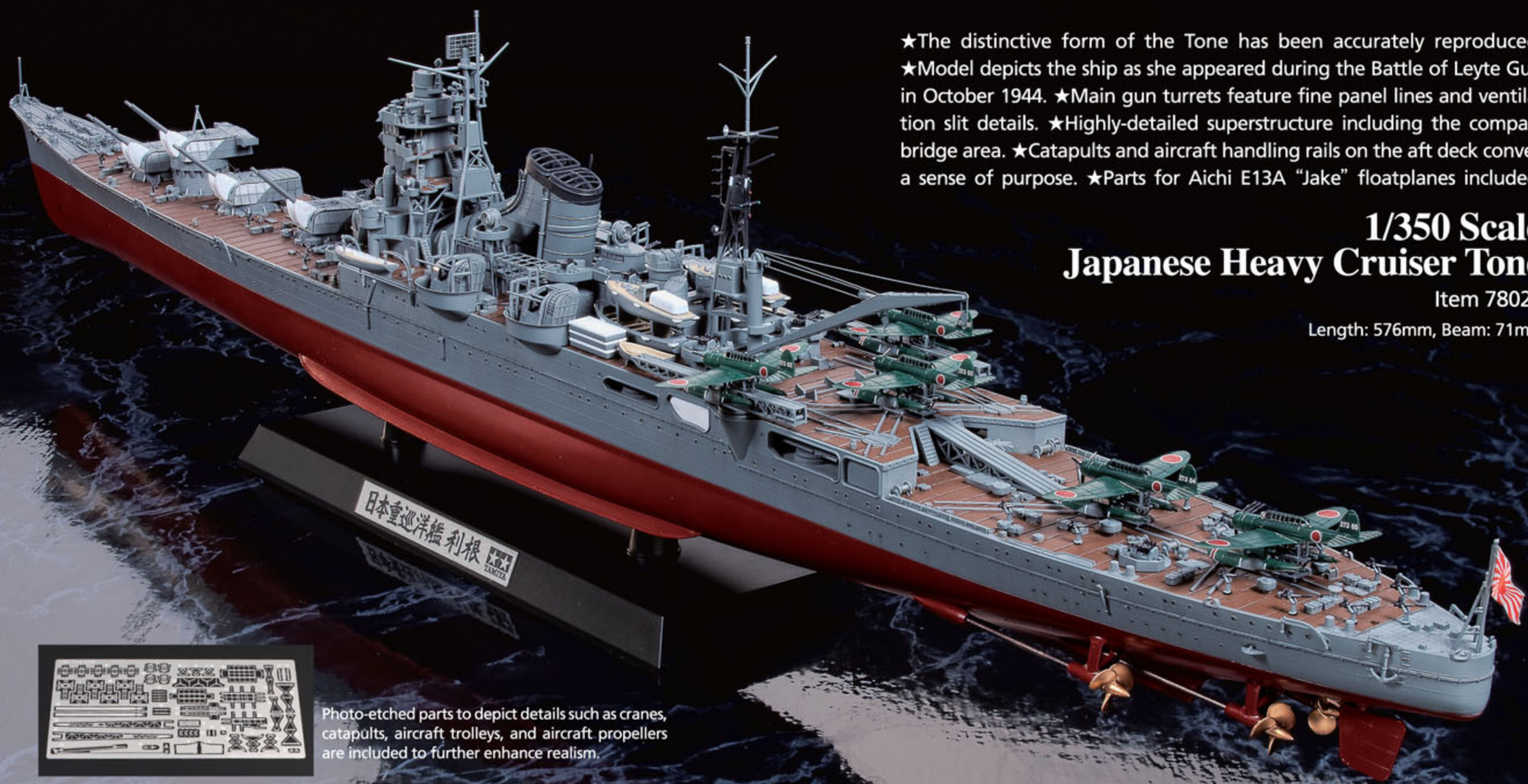
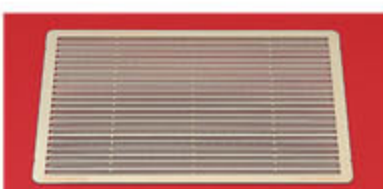


Photo-etched parts to depict details such as cranes, catapults, aircraft trolleys, and aircraft propellers are included to further enhance realism.

#### Detail-Up Parts

This set can be used to reproduce the degaussing cables which were seen on many WWII Japanese Navy warships.

1/350 Scale Degaussing Cable Set



Item 12630



(Example)

#### Display Case

Made from 3mm thick acrylic material, this case is the perfect size to fit 1/350 scale cruiser models such as the Tone.

Display Case N (w/Base)



Item 73018

(Example) Ship model is not included.

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